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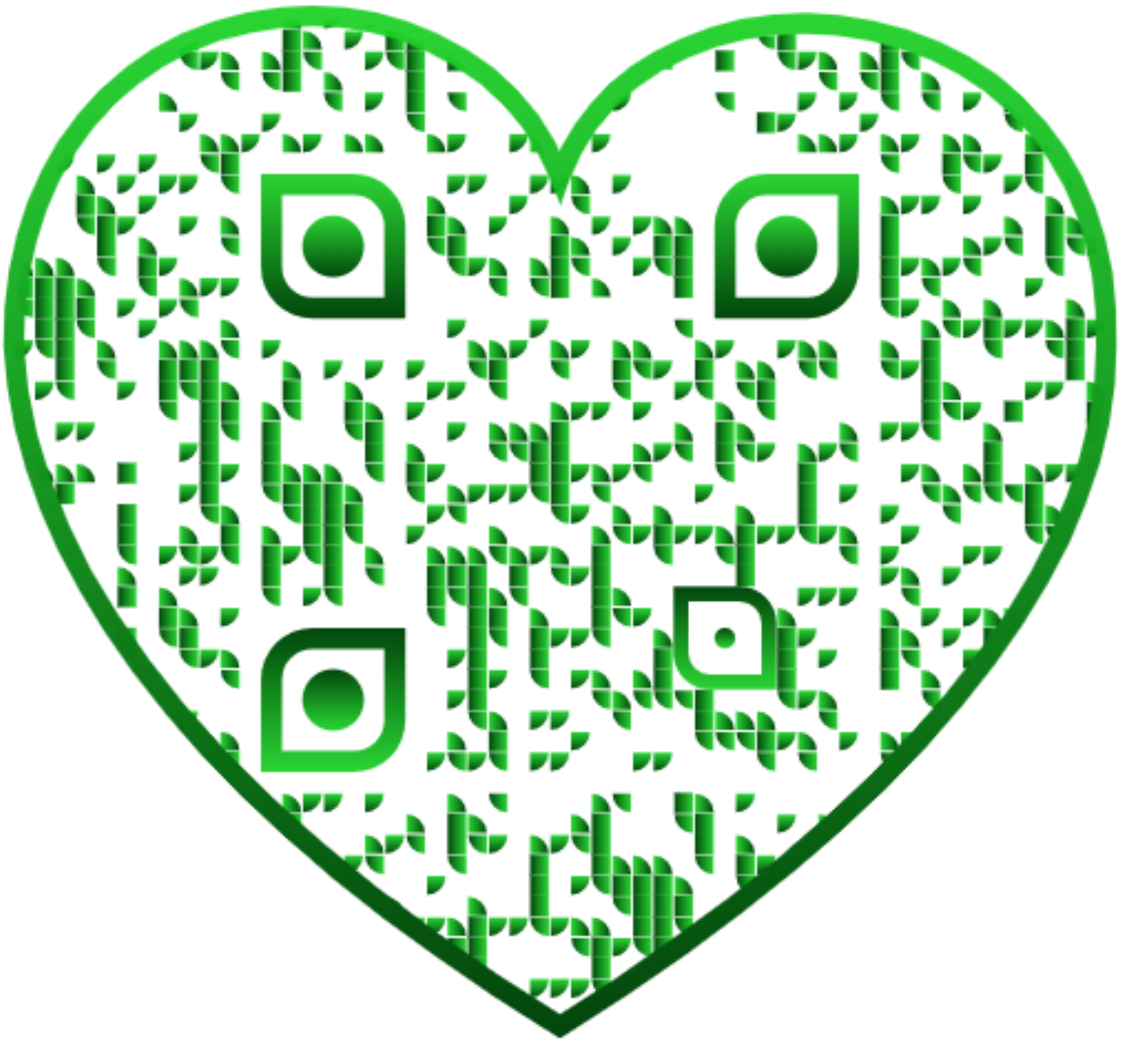

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GOLD

THE SYMPHONIES
A BEETHOVEN JOURNEY

VERBIER FESTIVAL CHAMBER ORCHESTRA
GÁBOR TAKÁCS-NAGY

Over a thirteen-year period, Gábor Takács-Nagy and the Verbier Festival Chamber Orchestra embarked on a spiritual journey through the nine symphonies of Beethoven. The resultant cycle of recordings captures the ensemble's liberated and transformative account of these masterworks, approaching each opus with a sense of spontaneity, insight, and joy. In the words of legendary Beethoven biographer Jan Swafford: „Honesty is what we hear: no romantic lushness, no ego, rather a sense of the truth of each piece on its own terms. There is a sense of intimate communication between an orchestra and conductor in service of a vision of the works as individuals and as a whole."

GRAMOPHONE

SOUNDS OF AMERICA

A special eight-page section focusing on recent recordings from the US and Canada

Axelrod

'5×4 – Quartets for Various Instruments'
An Opening, a Waltz, a Song, an Ending[a]. Chants and Antiphons[b]. Emeq[c]. Four Large Objects[d]. Punctuated![e]
[a]**Black Oak Ensemble;** [c]**Clocks in Motion;**
[e]**Lakeshore Rush;** [d]**The Growlers;**
[b]**The Pyrenean Quartet**
Ravello (RR8087 • 53')

The concept here is five (relatively recent) quartets, all constituted very diversely, performed by five different ensembles, but all the product of the same creative intelligence. If Lawrence Axelrod (*b*1960) has a compositional speciality, it is for chamber and instrumental music, which comprises over 80 per cent of his catalogue, and for which – on the evidence of the works collected here – he has a decided gift.

The earliest is *Punctuated!* (2010), four movements (the other pieces are all single-span) written as a competition entry for the specific line-up of flute, clarinet, cello and piano. Another stipulation was that the work be written within two weeks, and there are signs of haste in these aphoristic miniatures portraying four punctuation marks: the asterisk, ellipsis, period and question mark. Axelrod's depictions are highly subjective but as abstract creations they are exquisitely rendered by the members of Lakeshore Rush, even down to the questioning final gesture. More involving is the quartet for flute and strings *An Opening, a Waltz, a Song, an Ending* (2013), the title of which – after much searching by the composer – tells the listener all that they need to know about the work's expressive profile, and the Black Oak Ensemble play it very neatly. The Pyrenean Quartet are more tentative in the latest work here, *Chants and Antiphons* (2020), Axelrod's sixth work for string quartet, a study of restraint but slightly airlessly recorded.

Axelrod's penchant for pithy titles is nowhere more acute than in the percussion quartet *Emeq* (2015), a word meaning 'estuary' in the Yup'ik language of a coastal Alaskan people. This highly evocative score – written for the performers here, Clocks in Motion – is superbly performed, and to my ears the finest composition on the disc, a fascinating depiction of calving glaciers, icy cold, and a tidal bore rushing upstream in the closing crescendo. That said, *Four Large Objects* (2020), for a quartet of double basses – the 'large objects' of the title – is a thoroughly engaging essay in sonority, in three compact movements playing without break, thoroughly engagingly performed by the wonderfully titled group The Growlers. **Guy Rickards**

Bland

Piano Sonatas – No 9, 'Spring'; No 10. Nouveau Rag
Kevin Gorman *pf*
Bridge (BRIDGE9580 • 71')

US composer William Bland (*b*1947) uses 'sonata' as the title of both multi-movement works and the term becomes a sort of umbrella. Over the centuries 'sonata' has been applied very broadly. Most (but not all) have been instrumental, absolute music without a programme; these two sonatas of Bland's are programmatic with descriptive movement titles such as 'Flowers' and 'A panther with his head turning to the left'. Like Charles Ives, Bland uses the term 'sonata' as a container for reminiscences of popular music and responses to nature. The title 'sonata' seems not to have a link of form with sonatas of any earlier period. Rather, it shows that the works are of serious purpose.

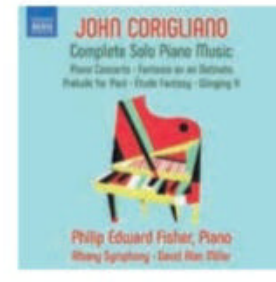
Bland has composed some 24 piano sonatas, and No 9 and No 10 deploy a style that is attuned to past idioms. The writing is neo-Romantic, displaying a comprehensive understanding of keyboard techniques. Sonata No 9 moves from a Rachmaninov-like opening, rhapsodic and improvisatory with elaborate figurations, to a bluesy, Gershwinesque second movement replete with chord clusters, boisterous glissandos and vivid contrasts of dynamics. Some passages would sit comfortably in a jazz club. Then the expansive and often touching 'Flowers' movement, in five sections, features soaring lyrical tunes, thick chordal passages, elaborate arpeggios and arabesques that roll up and down the keyboard, and Ravelian textures (in the 'Honeysuckle and Mock Orange' stanza). The last section riffs convincingly on two themes from Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*, Book 2: the Prelude in F and Fugue in C.

Sonata No 10 has an opening reminiscent of Scriabin's Fifth Sonata, with noisy rumblings from the low bass. The piano-writing is taxing, with volleys of rapid repeated notes and stark contrasts of register. What follows is a bracing, bravura Charleston ('like the dance', the composer writes, 'and also … the state capital of my native West Virginia'.) The ensuing Nocturne pays homage to Chopin, while the concluding Waltz opens vehemently, a sort of *valse macabre* whose obsessiveness suggests Ravel's *La valse*.

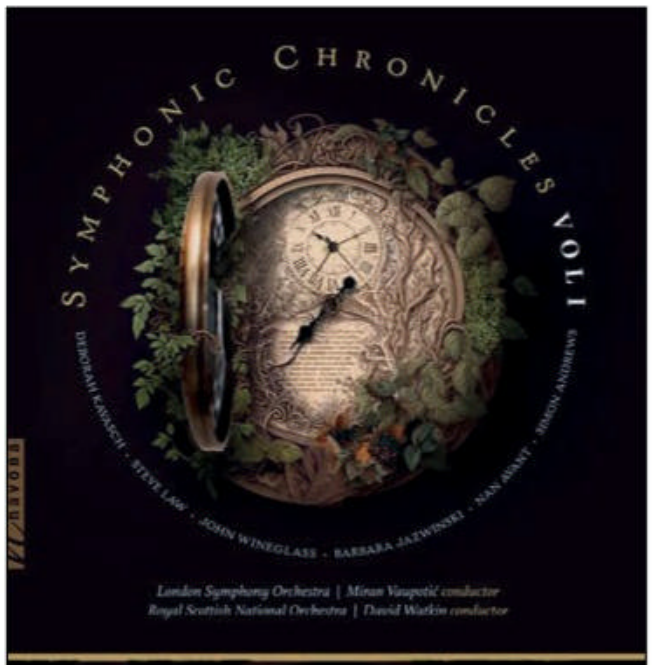
The brief *Nouveau Rag* offers a homage to Scott Joplin with its spicy harmonies and distinctive rhythms, before a more reflective second half. Pianist Kevin Gorman negotiates all the music with ardour and panache on the Yamaha CFX piano. **Stephen Cera**

Corigliano

'Complete Solo Piano Music'
Étude Fantasy. Fantasia on an Ostinato. Piano Concerto[a]. Prelude for Paul. Winging It
Philip Edward Fisher *pf*
[a]**Albany Symphony Orchestra / David Alan Miller**
Naxos American Classics (8 559930 • 80')



It's difficult to imagine a more New York composer than John Corigliano or, for that matter, to imagine New York's musical landscape without him. The son of a long-serving concertmaster of the New York Philharmonic, Corigliano turns 85 this year and has lived in the city his entire life.



SYMPHONIC CHRONICLES VOL. 1

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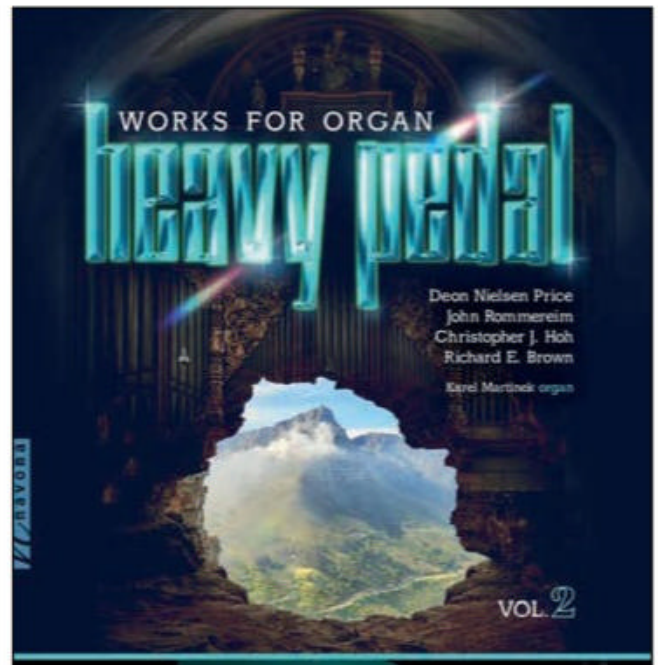

HEAVY PEDAL VOL. 2

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HEAVY PEDAL 2 brings the organ down from the choir loft to allow all listeners a greater appreciation of this incredibly dynamic instrument. Featuring the music of several contemporary composers, the collection lives up to its name with a smooth balance of power and musicality.

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LARRY AXELROD

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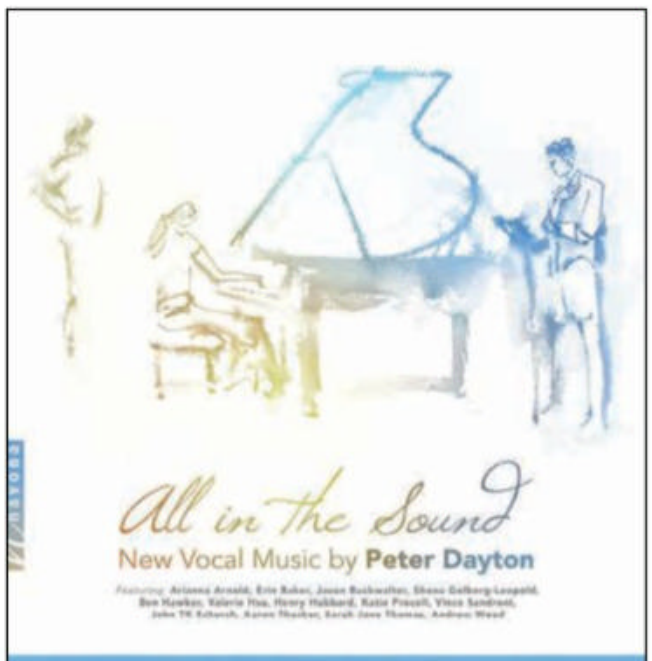

ALL IN THE SOUND
PETER DAYTON

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DEBRA KAYE

On **IKARUS AMONG THE STARS**, award-winning composer **Debra Kaye** explores themes both real and surreal, perpetual and fleeting, nonchalant, and profound. The works presented here draw their inspiration from Spanish poetry, real-life tragedy, and pieces by fellow contemporary composers.

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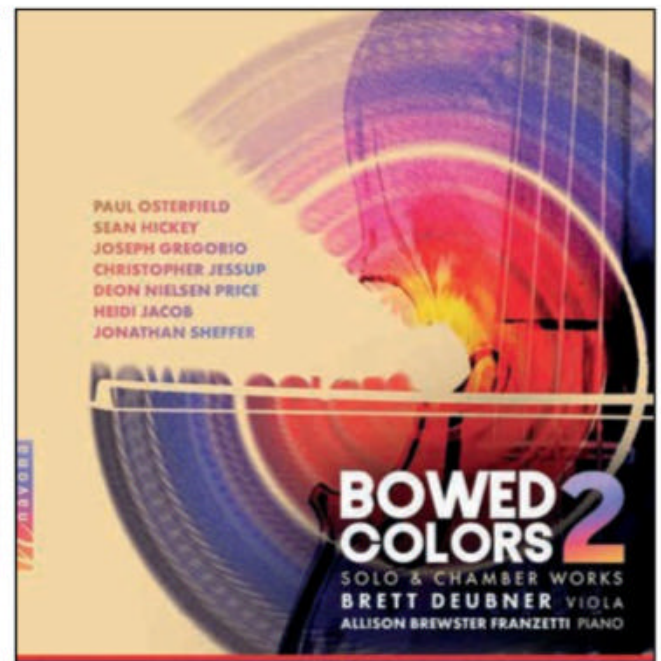

BOWED COLORS VOL. 2

PAUL OSTERFIELD, SEAN HICKEY, JOSEPH GREGORIO, CHRISTOPHER JESSUP, DEON NIELSEN PRICE, HEIDI JACOB, JONATHAN SHEFFER

Violist **Brett Deubner** tackles a vibrant collection of Bach-inspired compositions for the viola on **BOWED COLORS 2**. Deubner set his sights on the works of seven American composers, and the result is a dynamic album of showstoppers for the alto voice of the string family.

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brettdeubner.com
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Domingo Hindoyan leads the RLPO in works expressly composed for him by Roberto Sierra, music of ardent lyricism inspired by Latin American dance forms

There can't be many pianists who have made it their business to master all of Corigliano's solo piano music, as well as his Piano Concerto. Philip Edward Fisher, a native of Birmingham, UK, is one who has done so with distinction, drawing on immense technical resources and a wide-ranging spectrum of colour and dynamics, all imbued with the rhythmic vitality this music demands.

All those qualities are on display in the Piano Concerto, among the earlier of Corigliano's 18 concertante works to date. Fisher's apt collaborators are David Alan Miller and the Albany Symphony, who manage the many instances of dialogue between soloist and ensemble with aplomb. All told, this is a passionate interpretation of a fiendishly difficult score, its four movements characterised by intellectual cohesion and sumptuous sensuality.

The *Fantasia on an Ostinato*, commissioned by the Van Cliburn Foundation for its 1986 competition in Fort Worth, is a mysterious, beguiling work of truly extraordinary beauty. Eschewing the idea of a virtuoso showpiece, Corigliano chose instead to showcase the performers' 'musicality and imagination'. The centre of the piece could be considered aleatory since the performer must choose the number and character of a series of interlocking repetitions. During the '86 competition, the length of the piece ranged from seven to more than 20 minutes; Fisher clocks in at just over 13. No nuance escapes his attention in this profound interpretation of disarming expressivity. It's a reading that may replace that of Ursula Oppens (Cedille, 10/11^{US}) as the recorded standard.

The lyrical *Prelude for Paul* was written for Paul Sekhri, whom Corigliano describes as a biotech CEO with a love of music so great he has the opening chords of Rachmaninov's Second Piano Concerto tattooed on his forearm. Terse and richly atmospheric, the Prelude manages to quote those iconic chords with remarkable subtlety and grace.

The *Étude Fantasy* is actually five discrete pieces, commissioned by the Kennedy Center during the US bicentennial on behalf of pianist James Tocco. The first of the five is an immensely resourceful response to the challenges of writing for the left hand alone. The second is all flight and chase but of a delicacy that might suggest fireflies. The quiet beginning of the third étude seems to herald a contemplative contrast, but it's only a red herring. A veritable explosion ushers in some of the most technically daunting textures of the entire disc. Arrival at the fifth brings a relaxed tempo and subdued dynamics, though harmonies remain as rich as ever.

In *Winging It*, Corigliano set himself the task of transcribing as accurately as possible a series of improvisations for Ursula Oppens to play in concert. Each is titled with the date of the original improvisation. Fisher captures the moment's white heat these pieces evoke. Most striking, however, is the second, 'January 3, 2008', which seems to explore hallowed ground in a spirit of reverent awe. **Patrick Rucker**

R Sierra

Alegría. Fandangos. Two Pieces for Orchestra. Sinfonietta for String Orchestra. Symphony No 6[a]

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra / Domingo Hindoyan

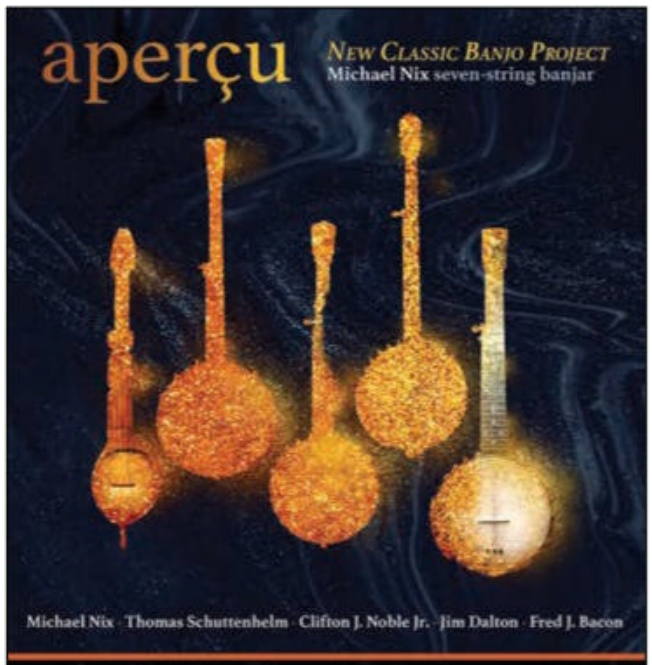
Onyx (ONYX4232 • 65')

[a]Recorded live at Philharmonic Hall, Liverpool, October 14 & 16, 2021

Roberto Sierra (*b*1953) composed his Sinfonietta for string orchestra (2020) and Sixth Symphony (2022) expressly for Domingo Hindoyan – the former for a pandemic-era programme the conductor was leading with the Detroit Symphony, the latter for Hindoyan's inaugural concert as music director of the RLPO.

The Sinfonietta is a terrific piece. Its syncopated outer movements swing and sway – a characteristic inspired by Latin American dance forms that one hears in much of the Puerto Rican-born composer's music – yet there's ardent lyricism, too.

PHOTOGRAPHY: CHRIS CHRISTODOULOU



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MICHAEL NIX

APERÇU from composer and banjo innovator **Michael Nix** challenges listeners to reimagine the banjo as an instrument. Brought to life by Nix's 7-string Banjar, the album incorporates various folk and classical styles to forge a newfangled genre: New Classical Banjo.

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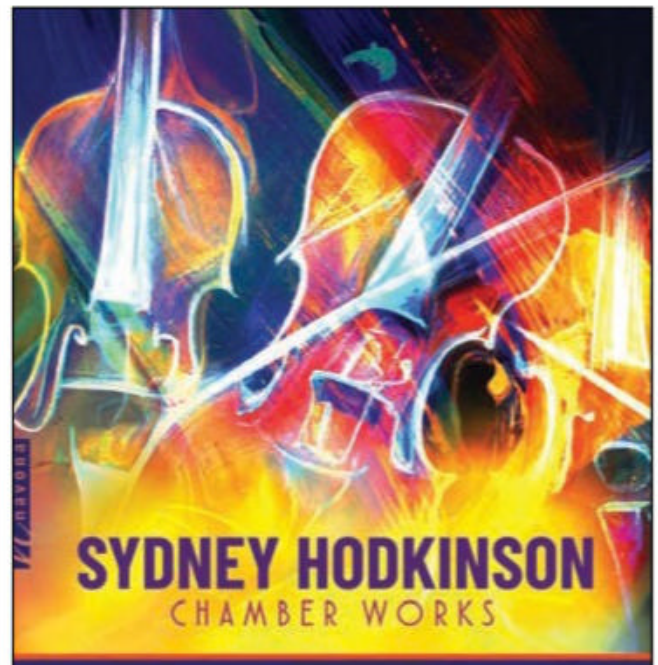

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SYDNEY HODKINSON

With works written in dedication to family members, loved ones, and friends, **SYDNEY HODKINSON: CHAMBER WORKS** brings four live recordings of the late composer's string quartets and a trio to life with performances from the Benda Quartet and the Jupiter Quartet.

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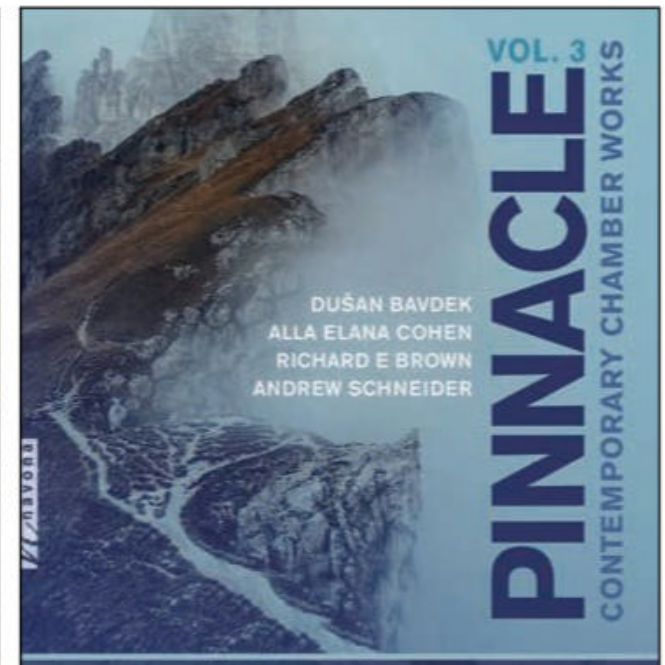

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LEGENDS AND LIGHT VOL. 3 is an ambitious collection of new works performed by the **Janáček Philharmonic Ostrava**. Inspired by art, mystical experiences, and the wonders of our universe, this album casts a spotlight on the compositional innovation and orchestral ferocity of today's composers and performers.

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STEVEN MASI

Lauded by critics for his masterful touch and dynamic style, **Steven Masi** capitalizes on the unrivaled emotive power of solo piano throughout **SCHUBERT LATE WORKS**, drawing out a voice from the instrument that is profoundly human.

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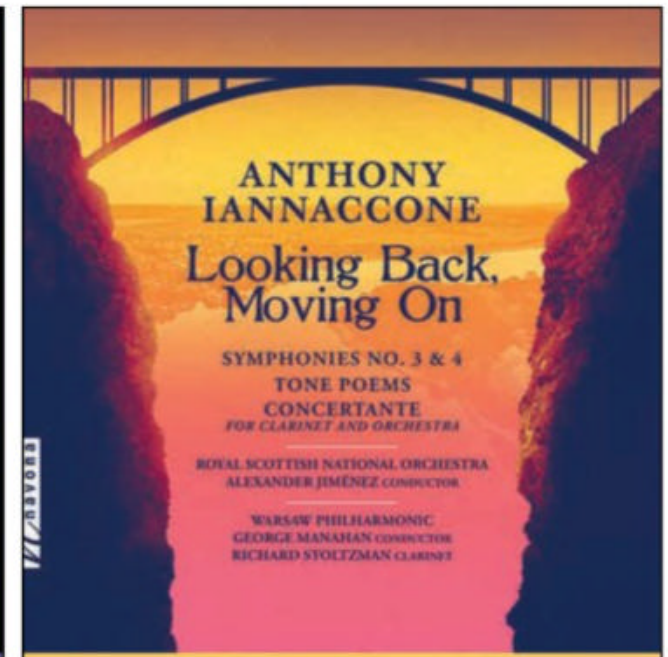

LOOKING BACK, MOVING ON
ANTHONY IANNACCONE

LOOKING BACK, MOVING ON from composer **Anthony Iannaccone** delivers spirited, organically structured, imaginative, and formidable displays of American verve across two symphonies, tone poems, and a Concertante for Clarinet and Orchestra.

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Indeed, the hushed slow movement contains some of Sierra's most haunting melodic ideas, while the scurrying slip of a Scherzo, with its predominance of pizzicato writing, offers an unexpected hint of something sinister.

The Sixth Symphony has striking passages but doesn't quite hang together for me the way the Sinfonietta does. Here, again, the delicately scored slow movement is a highlight. Sierra describes it as evoking 'a magical night in the tropics', and I sense a whiff of romance as well, but at three and a half minutes it feels almost too slight. The third movement's depiction of a hurricane continues the tradition of storm-painting (Beethoven's *Pastoral* was a model, the composer writes) but doesn't really add much to it. And yet I almost always find something in Sierra's music that catches my ear. In the finale, it's some of the connective passages, like the chattering cascades of woodwinds at 1'12".

Fandangos (2000) – based on music by Soler, Boccherini and Scarlatti – has been recorded before, including a swashbuckling account by Giancarlo Guerrero and the Nashville Symphony (Naxos, 5/14[US]), but Hindoyan and the RLPO find a strain of elegance and sensuality that's wholly compelling. The disc opens with the exuberant, brightly coloured *Alegría* (1996), an effective and pithy curtain-raiser that's also been recorded before (in a version for wind ensemble). The *Two Pieces for Orchestra* (2017) are new to the catalogue, and they're well worth hearing. In the first, 'Like a lament', Sierra creates a miniature musical world that's alluringly dark and abounds with lush detail, while the dancelike second piece demonstrates his ability to build tension phrase by phrase. The RLPO play with precision and gusto throughout, and the recorded sound is excellent. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

The Orchestra of St Luke's, New York

Our monthly guide to North American ensembles

Founded 1974
Home The DiMenna Center for Classical Music

In 1974 a group of New York City's top freelance musicians came together as the St Luke's Chamber Ensemble, taking their name from their concert series at the Church of St Luke in the Fields in Manhattan's Greenwich Village. These musicians became the core of the Orchestra of St Luke's, which debuted in the summer of 1979 as the orchestra-in-residence at the Caramoor Festival in Katonah, New York (two hours or so north of the city), a role they continue to play every summer.

In 1983 the OSL made their first appearance at Carnegie Hall in a concert with the Vienna Boys' Choir, and the following year became part of the storied venue's curated season in a Handel Opera Festival with a starry cast led by Marilyn Horne and conductors Raymond Leppard, Charles Mackerras and John Nelson. Since 1986 they have had their own subscription series at Carnegie. Roger Norrington was named the OSL's first principal conductor in 1990, followed by Mackerras, Donald Runnicles, Pablo Heras-Casado and, starting in 2017, Bernard Labadie, whose contract was recently extended through the 2024-25 season.

The OSL continue to offer chamber music concerts and also run an extensive educational outreach programme – the latter significantly enhanced by the opening in 2011 of The DiMenna Center. Located in Hell's Kitchen, a formerly rough-and-tumble, economically diverse area near the Theatre District, The DiMenna Center has performance venues and the city's only acoustically optimised rehearsal and recording facilities dedicated exclusively to classical music. More than 100,000 visitors – many from the neighbourhood – have attended programmes at DiMenna, which the orchestra owns and operates.

Educational activities include free concerts for more than 10,000 public school students per year, a Youth Orchestra that provides classes to 150 violin, viola and cello students from neighbourhood schools, a Chamber Music Mentorship programme for graduate-level music students, and the DeGaetano Composition Institute, a seven-month programme in which emerging composers develop works for chamber orchestra under the guidance of a mentor composer (this year it's Anna Clyne). The OSL also go out into the community every season, giving free concerts in every corner of the city as part of their Five Borough Tour.

Many *Gramophone* readers probably know the OSL from their extensive recording activity, which has now resulted in well over one hundred discs for a variety of labels. Highlights include a collaboration with tango master Astor Piazzolla, the recording premiere of Adams's *Nixon in China* (both Nonesuch), Haydn symphonies and Handel's *Water Music* with Mackerras (Telarc), a Stravinsky series with Robert Craft (now on Naxos), *bel canto* scenes with Renée Fleming (Decca) and Tchaikovsky's *Winter Daydreams* Symphony under Heras-Casado (Harmonia Mundi).

This season, in addition to their regular subscription series at Carnegie, the OSL are presenting a three-concert Bach Festival featuring Jeremy Denk, Gil Shaham and countertenor Hugh Cutting. An enterprising new interdisciplinary 'Visionary Sounds' series, focusing on artists of the 20th and 21st centuries, includes programmes with the US Poet Laureate Rita Dove and composer Anna Clyne, and a performance of rarely heard works by Julius Eastman. Indeed, the OSL's commitment to new music has been unwavering throughout its 49-year existence, with an impressive total of nearly 200 commissions and premieres.

In 2024 the Orchestra of St Luke's will celebrate their 50th birthday. They may not be the city's most high-profile musical entity but clearly they've earned their turn in the spotlight.
Andrew Farach-Colton

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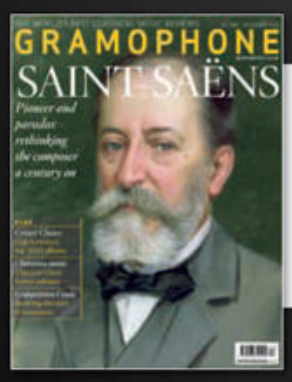

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A LETTER FROM *New York*

Jed Distler reflects on product versus process

Most *Gramophone* readers know me as a regular contributor of reviews and articles, usually about pianists, piano literature and piano recordings. I'm also an active professional composer/pianist who has been making up for lost time at the start of the post-pandemic era. Recently I participated in *The Pianists United: Rzewski in New York*, a marathon day of three concerts presented at the Kaufman Music Center with 14 pianists playing works by the late Frederic Rzewski. Several friends and colleagues on the bill asked me seriously if I was going to review the event, even though I was playing on it myself. 'Are you serious?' I replied. Furthermore, I make a policy of not reviewing my friends, even if I had reviewed them in the past before I got to know them personally.

Still, that doesn't stop my pianist friends from asking me, or to put in a good word for them with the reviews editor. And I don't blame them, because classical music gets less and less coverage these days. I have to admit that many musicians with whom I'm now collaborating professionally first communicated with me because I reviewed their CDs, usually thanking me with an email. Then we meet in person, we play piano duets and decide that we want to perform together. That's how cellist Juliana Soltis and I formed a duo last year. That's why I'm performing four-hand concerts this coming season with folks whose albums I've reviewed in these pages such as Peter Jablonski, Alexandra Papastefanou and Claire Huangci.

> Does my reviewing life inform my own practising, performing and recording? Yes, unequivocally yes

Such conflicts of interest never bothered the American composer and critic Virgil Thomson, who even went so far as to review an orchestral concert on which a work of his was being played. Which leads me to ask, can I review myself? Does my reviewing life inform my own practising, performing and recording? And vice versa, for that matter? Yes, unequivocally yes.

When I review a piano album, I try to listen carefully on both macro and micro levels, to evaluate both the big picture and small details. I usually have comparisons handy, since I have to tell readers if pianist X's Chopin Ballades are as well played and engineered as pianist Y's recording released two weeks earlier, or to disparage the latest Beethoven practitioner for not being Schnabel, Kempff, Arrau and so on. Yet I tend to take extenuating circumstances into account, for example a young pianist who had to record a full programme of taxing, technically demanding works in one long marathon session, with few opportunities for retakes. There wasn't even time to properly tune the piano. Yes, he was prepared to the nines, but he wound up playing relatively carefully under pressure, compared to the looser and more dynamic live performances of the same works I heard him give at a private concert many months later. What a contrast to hearing Glenn Gould's complete 1981 *Goldberg Variations* sessions release by Sony/BMG, where he spends multiple takes honing and refining his conceptions until he gets exactly what he's after. Then again, being a best-selling icon Gould had the luxury of generous studio time, yet he used his time efficiently, not indulgently, and was unfailingly considerate to the recording team. That's a lesson all recording artists should learn.

Although I study pieces from the score first and foremost, I do listen to recordings before I go into the studio myself, simply because I know that I have to be better than or at least sufficiently different from the competition, and that some reviewer will invariably compare my interpretation alongside others. I also might learn what not to do, or what I don't like. Recently Juliana Soltis and I recorded Margaret Bonds's cello/piano arrangement of her piece *Troubled Water*, which is originally for piano solo. Every solo pianist I've heard on disc slams through the section where the minor-key mode returns, completely missing the music's call-and-response momentum and gravitas. Even if Bonds wanted this section to be played fast and brilliantly, I just can't agree, even if I'm wrong.

Similarly, because I'm in the middle of a project performing all of Mahler's symphonies in four-hand transcriptions with different pianists, I've been revisiting and re-evaluating orchestral recordings of these works, and am surprised how much I've changed my mind about certain interpretations. As a teenager I imprinted upon the 1970 Georg Solti/Chicago Symphony Mahler Fifth. It's brilliantly virtuoso, hard-hitting, edgy and exciting as hell. Shortly after I first heard it, I stumbled upon the John Barbirolli/New Philharmonia traversal, which I thought sounded comparatively sluggish. Yet I now adore Barbirolli's conversational interplay and songful inflections, the air between the notes and balances that never clog up. It's closer to what I'm trying to get out of the piano arrangement.

Last year, when Jerry Kuderna and I were preparing Mahler's Ninth Symphony for four hands, we found that slow meticulous practice helped us to dig into the music's dark, fragile corners and excruciating climaxes. During that period we listened to some recent studio recordings that were impeccably executed yet somewhat inhibited, as if the conductors were afraid to let their orchestras go bonkers when required. We then listened to the messy, imperfect live Bruno Walter/Vienna and Bruno Maderna/RAI recordings. Forget the mishaps and train wrecks: what daring, intensity and character in every bar, engulfing listeners in their struggle. Perhaps in the heat of struggling we needed to be with fellow strugglers, going through process? In other words, music as real life. G

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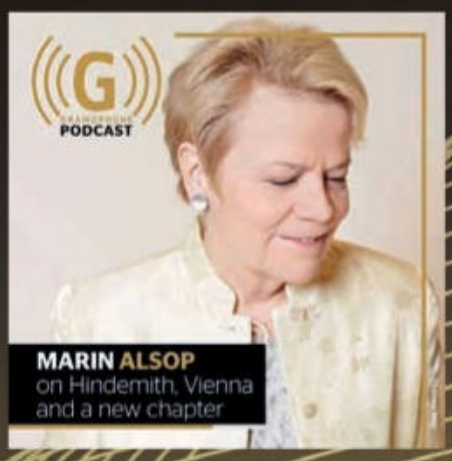

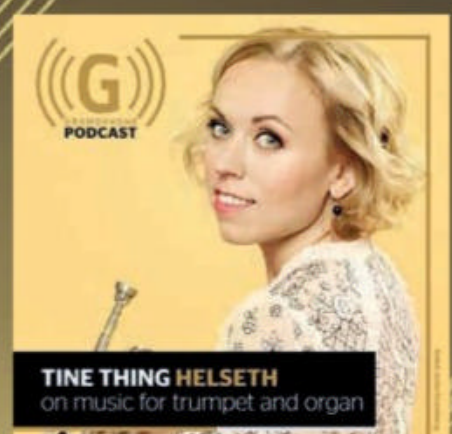

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GRAMOPHONE

Founded in 1923 by Sir Compton Mackenzie and Christopher Stone as 'an organ of candid opinion for the numerous possessors of gramophones'

Historically informed understanding

There's a risk that music can become too separated from its context. It's perfectly fine, of course, for music to be enjoyed as abstract art – surely a successful work needs to be able to stand up in its own right, due to its beauty or power alone. But that doesn't mean we can't seek to gain much from understanding its history. Sometimes that's more obvious than others: Shostakovich's *Leningrad* Symphony is all the more impactful for our understanding of the horrific conflict that lay behind it. A Bach cantata conveys a universal truth, but also gains from understanding the liturgical season and Lutheran society for which it was written. I spoke this month to countertenor Reginald Mobley for a podcast about Spirituals, songs so full of hope despite the suffering they're rooted in, as to be almost unbearably moving. *The Marriage of Figaro* is all the more fascinating when seen in the shifting social fabric of its era. But a Mozart concerto? A Haydn quartet? A Chopin prelude? While it's less clear cut exactly what is added by knowing the history, the context can still inform the way we hear them.

Which is why from time to time we place our focus exactly there. This month's cover story really encourages us to focus on key milestones in Handel's life – six crucial years which distil the events, era and ambition that shaped what he wrote and why. We hope the approach helps – more than a comprehensive biography in such space available could even start to – to illuminate how the man and music relate.

Museums like that of Handel's house (see page 8 and our website) can add a further rewarding dimension. Recreating a home that was lived in for 36 years during an intensely, richly evolving era of London life presents a challenge, but it's one this brilliantly restored venue solves by setting rooms at specific moments (including in one of Richard Wigmore's chosen years, 1741, when Handel was about to board the boat to Dublin for the premiere of *Messiah*). A visit would make a perfect accompaniment to our cover story (and while Jimi Hendrix isn't a regular to these pages, the neighbouring flat is a no less evocative recreation of a musical moment, this time at the tail end of the swinging sixties).

There are many ways to bring musical history to life: this month sees the UK cinema release of a film about Joseph Bologne, Chevalier de Saint-Georges, one of the most extraordinary – and remarkably little-known – figures of 18th-century European musical life (music being only one facet of his remarkable story). We talk to the film's director Stephen Williams on page 11 about how he depicted a historical character and made him resonant for our times.

Finally, speaking of making music for our own time, we're inviting you to once again vote for our Orchestra of the Year. As James Jolly explains on page 36, this is not about naming the 'best', as extraordinary as each of these ensembles is, but about celebrating the remarkable entity that is the modern orchestra and, as is increasingly recognised, one that makes a very real impact on audiences, in person and through recordings. We've enjoyed compiling the shortlist, and we can't wait to find out which you choose.

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'Handel is one of the composers I'd most like to have met,' writes **RICHARD WIGMORE**, author of this month's cover story. 'Fiercely independent yet with an underlying generosity of spirit, he excelled in every musical genre. Viewing his career through the lens of six pivotal years has only enhanced my admiration for both the man and his protean output.'

'Investigating the current state of art song became a journey without end, with each pocket of poetic activity leading to others that I had somehow missed,' writes **DAVID PATRICK STEARNS**. 'Every turn prompted increased gratitude for those who originally brought me into their song recital worlds: Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, Joan Morris, Maggie Teyte and especially Victoria de los Angeles.'

'Brahms's Violin Concerto is a work I love so deeply that to compile a Collection on it felt vaguely foolhardy,' writes **CHARLOTTE GARDNER**, who explores the huge catalogue of the work for us this month. 'What if all those hours of listening were to kill it for me? But no. It's been a fascinating journey from which I've emerged more enamoured than ever.'

***Gramophone*, which has been serving the classical music world since 1923, is first and foremost a monthly review magazine, delivered today in both print and digital formats. It boasts an eminent and knowledgeable panel of experts, which reviews the full range of classical music recordings. Its reviews are completely independent. In addition to reviews, its interviews and features help readers to explore in greater depth the recordings that the magazine covers, as well as offer insight into the work of composers and performers. It is *the* magazine for the classical record collector, as well as for the enthusiast starting a voyage of discovery.**

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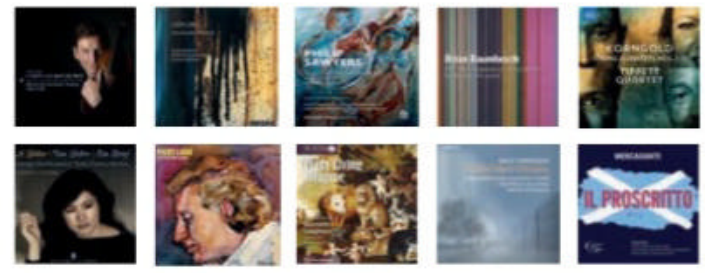

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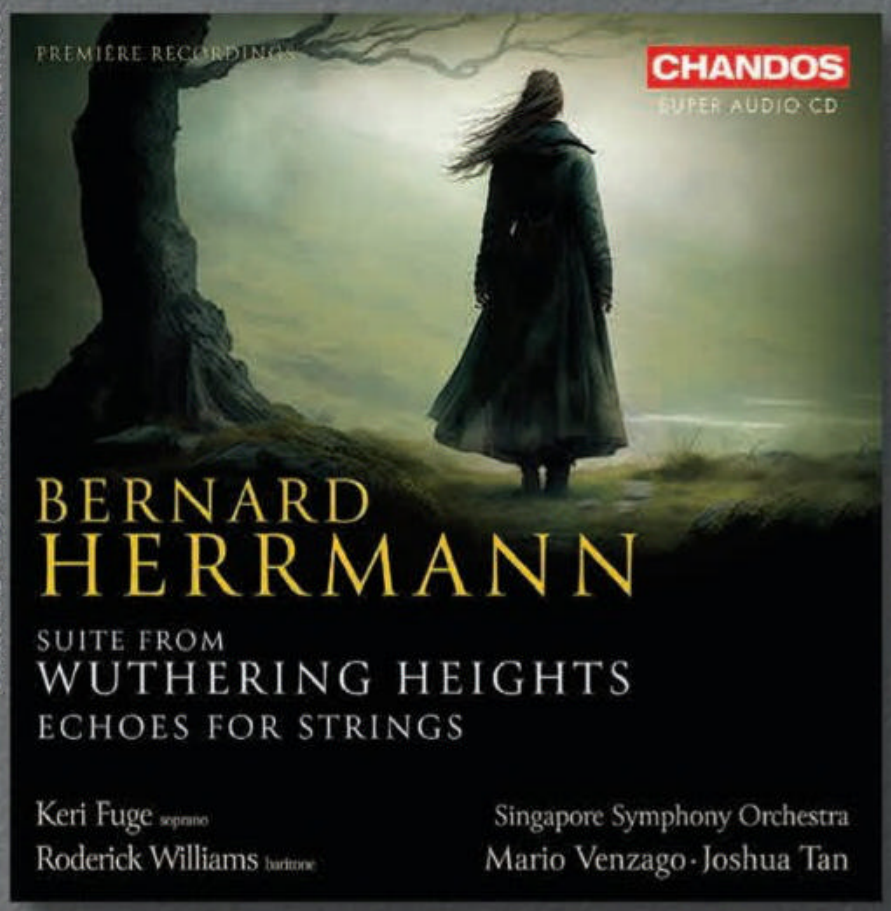


SURROUND-SOUND HYBRID SACD | DOLBY ATMOS SPATIAL AUDIO

RECORDING OF THE MONTH

HERRMANN
SUITE FROM 'WUTHERING HEIGHTS'; ECHOES FOR STRINGS

Keri Fuge| Roderick Williams |Singapore Symphony Orchestra | Mario Venzago | Joshua Tan

We are proud to present two world première recordings of works by the legendary Hollywood composer Bernard Herrmann – *Echoes*, (arranged for string orchestra by Hans Sørensen), and an extensive suite, (compiled by Hans Sørensen), from Herrmann's little-known opera *Wuthering Heights*. Keri Fuge and Roderick Williams take the roles of Cathy and Heathcliff.

CHSA 5337

SURROUND-SOUND HYBRID SACD | DOLBY ATMOS SPATIAL AUDIO

CHSA 5310

SHOSTAKOVICH
SYMPHONY NO. 14; SIX VERSES OF MARINA TSVETAYEVA

Elizabeth Atherton | Peter Rose Jess Dandy | BBC Philharmonic | John Storgårds

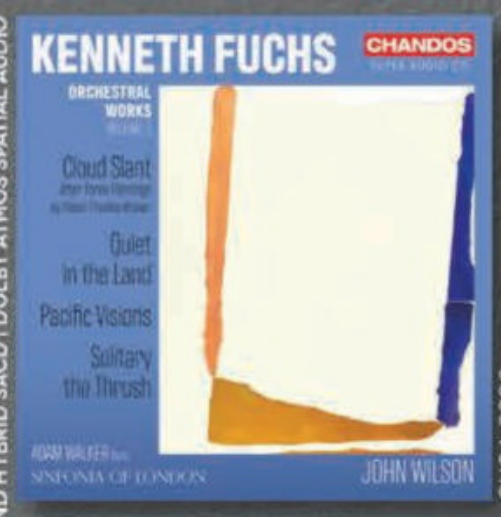
John Storgårds and the BBC Philharmonic continue their survey of Shostakovich's late symphonies with this recoding of the Fourteenth, with Elizabeth Atherton and Peter Rose as soloists. Jess Dandy sings the powerful Six Verses of Marina Tsvetayeva.

CHAN 20181

JOACHIM MENDELSON GRAŻYNA BACEWICZ
CHAMBER WORKS

Karolina Stalmachowska Piotr Sałajczyk | Silesian Quartet

The award-winning Silesian Quartet presents a new album featuring neglected works by two composers from Warsaw – Joachim Mendelson and Grażyna Bacewicz. The oboist Karolina Stalmachowska and pianist Piotr Sałajczyk join the Silesians in Mendelson's Quintet.



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KENNETH FUCHS
ORCHESTRAL WORKS, VOLUME 1

Adam Walker | Sinfonia of London John Wilson

Sinfonia of London and John Wilson present the first album in a series devoted to works by the leading American composer Kenneth Fuchs. *Cloud Slant* is a virtuosic concerto for orchestra, composed especially for these forces. Adam Walker is the soloist in the flute concerto *Solitary the Thrush*.

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ORCHESTRAL WORKS

BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra | Alpesh Chauhan

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GRAMOPHONE *Editor's choice*

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings from this month's reviews

RECORDING OF THE MONTH

HANDEL Serse
Sols; The English Concert / Harry Bicket
Linn
▶ EDWARD BREEN'S REVIEW IS ON PAGE 36

Highly engaging from the famous first aria onwards, this account of *Serse* – with a superb set of soloists led by Emily D'Angelo in the title role, all perfectly shaped by Harry Bicket – is a triumph.

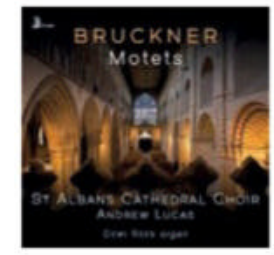
BACEWICZ Concertos for One and Two Pianos
Peter Jablonski, Elisabeth Brauss *pfs*
Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra / Nicholas Collon
Ondine
An excellent collection of Bacewicz's works, from committed advocates of her music.
▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 40

BEETHOVEN
Piano Concertos
Garrick Ohlsson *pf*
Grand Teton Music Festival Orchestra / Sir Donald Runnicles
Reference Recordings
We explored the background to these Beethoven concertos in May – the rapport between its artists is wonderful to hear.
▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 40

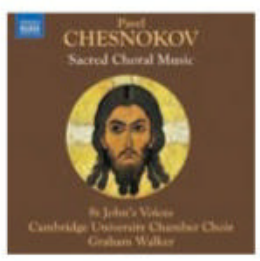
BRITTEN. BRUCH
Violin Concertos
Kerson Leong *vn*
Philharmonia Orchestra / Patrick Hahn
Alpha
Excellent Bruch is coupled with a truly impressive account of Britten's Concerto, Kerson Leong exploring its paths and power with sheer panache.
▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 42

FRANCK. MARTIN
Piano Quintets
Martin Klett *pf*
Armida Quartet
AVI-Music
There's a strong sense of composed control from the Armida Quartet and Martin Klett here, two different works receiving fascinating and thoughtful interpretations.
▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 56

'PIERS LANE GOES TO TOWN AGAIN'
Piers Lane *pf*
Hyperion
This return visit to a fascinating area of repertoire by a pianist, Piers Lane, who clearly loves and excels in it, gets an enthusiastic recommendation from our reviewer Jeremy Nicholas.
▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 66



BRUCKNER Motets
St Albans Cathedral Choir / Andrew Lucas
First Hand
Bruckner's Motets require a choir on top form – combining tonal beauty and sheer stamina, as reviewer Malcolm Riley puts it – and a conductor of impeccable insight, both of which they receive here.
▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 70



CHESNOKOV
All-Night Vigil
St John's Voices / Graham Walker
Naxos
This survey of music by the prolific Russian choral composer Pavel Chesnokov – the first full album of his music by an English choir – is rich in spiritual drama and gloriously recorded.
▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 70

SØRENSEN
St Matthew Passion
The Norwegian Soloists' Choir / Grete Pedersen
BIS
Bent Sørensen's work is a powerfully crafted portrayal of the Passion's relationship between suffering and love, exquisitely performed by the superb Norwegian Soloists' Choir.
▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 74

'DROP NOT, MINE EYES'
Alexander Chance *counterten* **Toby Carr** *lute*
Linn
The countertenor Alexander Chance recently joined the *Gramophone* Podcast to discuss this album – in his voice, these centuries old songs speak afresh to modern audiences.
▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 77

DVD/BLU-RAY

PUCCINI Tosca
Sols; Dutch National Opera / Lorenzo Viotti
Naxos
A *Tosca* that, Neil Fisher reveals, doesn't shy from the tyrannical brutality of the story and the regime it is set in, preserving the well-known work's ability to shock.
▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 83

REISSUE/ARCHIVE

SCHUBERT Symphony No 9
DEBUSSY Nocturnes
Hallé Orchestra / John Barbirolli
Barbirolli Society
Very fine Schubert and Debussy from Barbirolli and the Hallé and a revealing insight into the distinction between the conductor's work in the studio and in the concert hall.
▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 95

FOR THE RECORD

Sony signs Anastasia Kobekina

The cellist Anastasia Kobekina has signed to Sony Classical. Her debut album, which will be released in early 2024, is described as 'a musical portrait of Venice with a modern twist as she explores our relationships to places through the past and the present'.

Kobekina joins Sony Classical having already earned recognition both as a Borletti-Buitoni Trust Artist – she is a current member of the scheme – and as a BBC New Generation Artist from 2018 to 2021, as well as through prizes at the International Tchaikovsky Competition (2019) and the George Enescu International Competition (2016). She plays a Stradivarius from 1698.

'With her unique musical talent, exceptional creativity and passion for pushing the boundaries of classical music, we are confident that Anastasia Kobekina will be a major force in shaping the future of the genre,' said Per Hauber, President of Sony Classical.

Handel's home reopens

Handel's house in London, home to the composer for 36 years, from 1723 until his death in 1759 – as well its neighbouring flat, which was home to Jimi Hendrix in 1968-69 – has now reopened after a £3m restoration.

The museum, known as Handel Hendrix House, had closed to enable the work to be undertaken in 2021 – 20 years after it had initially opened thanks to the vision of long-time *Gramophone* writer Stanley Sadie. One of the most significant changes is that the front parlour, from which Handel had sold subscriptions to new works and concert tickets, has now been recreated (until recently it was a shop selling luxury leather items). Reacquiring use of this room has also enabled the museum's entrance to become the house's front door on Brooke Street.

The restoration's impressive attention to detail has involved painstaking research of original sources – from curtain colour to ironmongery (in the kitchen, the pots and pans have been re-made using 18th-century techniques, all based on the inventory made four months after Handel's death), and much is as close to original as possible. Attempts have been made to acquire art by painters that it's known Handel collected, and of similar scenes and sizes to what he'd owned. An organ has also been installed in the front parlour, based on the chamber organs of Richard Bridge and Thomas Parker, who had built one for *Messiah*'s librettist Charles Jennens – like other instruments in the house, it will be used for recitals. You can read more about the museum at *Gramophone*'s website.

Pintscher takes over in Kansas

Matthias Pintscher has been appointed Music Director of Kansas City Symphony, starting with the 2024/5 season. He succeeds Michael Stern, on an initial term of five seasons.

The German conductor and composer is in his 10th and final season as Music Director of acclaimed contemporary music group Ensemble Intercontemporain. The appointment was made just days after Pintscher's debut with the Kansas orchestra in March, with a programme comprising Ravel, Scriabin and Ligeti: 'That's how electric their rapport was from the first,' said President & CEO Danny Beckley of the decision that almost immediately followed the performance.

'The Kansas City Symphony is a world-class orchestra. It is dynamic, openminded and curious,' said Pintscher. 'What's more, it now plays in a state-of-the-art concert hall, one of the finest in the country, with phenomenal acoustics.'

Pintscher was profiled in our Contemporary Composer featured back in 2018, Richard Whitehouse positioned his most recent work as 'on the cusp between tradition and innovation'.

Dudamel steps down early in Paris

Gustavo Dudamel is stepping down as Music Director of the Paris Opera at the end of the current 2022/23 season, less than two years after starting the role, for personal reasons.

'It is with a heavy heart, and after long consideration, that I announce my resignation as Music Director of the Paris Opera, in order to spend more time with my family', said the Venezuelan conductor, who is also Music Director of the LA Philharmonic and due to take over the New York Philharmonic in 2026.

'It has been a privilege to share such wonderful moments with the Orchestra, Chorus, and artistic teams of Opera de Paris over the past two seasons. This is a time which I believe has changed all of us in many unique and complex ways, and I certainly have a greater appreciation for life, and for how art and music enriches my every day existence and that of those around us. I have no plans other than to be with my loved ones,' he added.

The announcement was completely unexpected – his initial appointment began in 2021 and was due to run until the 2026/27 season. Alexander Neef, Director of the Paris Opera, issued a statement of thanks to Dudamel 'whose passion and immense talent have brought so much to the repertoire of our house. Gustavo Dudamel is an immense musician. I express my deep gratitude to him for the work accomplished during his tenure, and I fully respect his decision.'

PHOTOGRAPHY: JULIA ALTUKHOVA, CHRISTOPHER ISON, FELIXBROEDE

Hilary Hahn's announces Ysaÿe album

Hilary Hahn has announced her latest Deutsche Grammophon album: Ysaÿe's Six Sonatas for Violin Solo, released on July 14, in Doby Atmos, on CD and as a 2-LP gatefold vinyl edition. The release – recorded in the autumn – marks the centenary of when the composer began the works, pieces considered a pivotal point in the development of violin repertoire, and described by Hahn as 'iconic, generation-defining, and a beautiful celebration of the instrument'.

Hahn clearly feels personally linked to the pieces. 'Just as Eugène Ysaÿe was inspired by Bach to write these six sonatas – and in doing so set a crucial milestone in the evolution of the violin – so too am I inspired by Ysaÿe to continually grow as an artist, to pour all of myself into this music ... the sounds you hear aren't just the product of the notes on the page, but of a centuries-long artistic lineage that has led me to this moment in time – me, standing on my own two feet with just my two hands, a violin, a bow, and four strings.'

Massive Maria Callas box-set coming soon

There's still time to pre-order Warner Classics's mammoth tribute to Maria Callas, due out in September, and boasting 131 CDs, 3 Blu-ray discs and a DVD, at a price of £250. Called 'La Davina', it features Maria Callas in all 74 of her roles for which audio documents exist, and includes her complete studio recordings – many of which remain top catalogue recommedations – plus an extensive collection of her best live recordings, the masterclasses she gave at the Juilliard School, videos, and a bonus CD of world premiere releases gathering together alternative takes and working sessions from studio recordings of the 1960s. There will be advance digital releases of some of the set's contents to look out for beforehand.

ONE TO WATCH

Maria Ioudenitch Violin

Born in Balashov, Russia, to pianist parents, this month's superb young artist then grew up in Kansas City, studying at the Curtis Institute of Music and the New England Conservatory. Multiple competition successes came in 2021 when she was awarded first prize in the Ysaÿe International Music Competition, the Tibor Varga International Violin Competition and the Joseph Joachim International Violin Competition, the latter offering as part of the prize a debut album on Warner Classics. Since October 2022 she has been studying at Kronberg Academy with Christian Tetzlaff.

That debut album has now been issued, and is reviewed on page 58. Called 'Songbird' it draws together music from the 19th and 20th centuries including from both Russia and America. Performed with the pianist Kenny Broberg it showcases, writes reviewer Jed Distler, 'the warmth and evenness of Ioudenitch's sonority in all registers.'

Singing – as the title suggests – lies at the concept's heart. 'I really gravitate towards the human singing voice,' says Ioudenitch, 'and find lots of inspiration for how I shape my sound ... it is through singers that I learned that one held note can have many different kinds of expression, as it sits on different harmonies and transforms into the next note.' Perhaps that's to be expected from someone who recalls that her grandfather 'would sit me down and put on 12 different recordings of the same aria, and then test me on who the singers were and which recordings were the best!'

'Songbird' is a wonderful introduction to this impressive violinist, for those who have not already had a chance to experience her on the concert or competition stage.

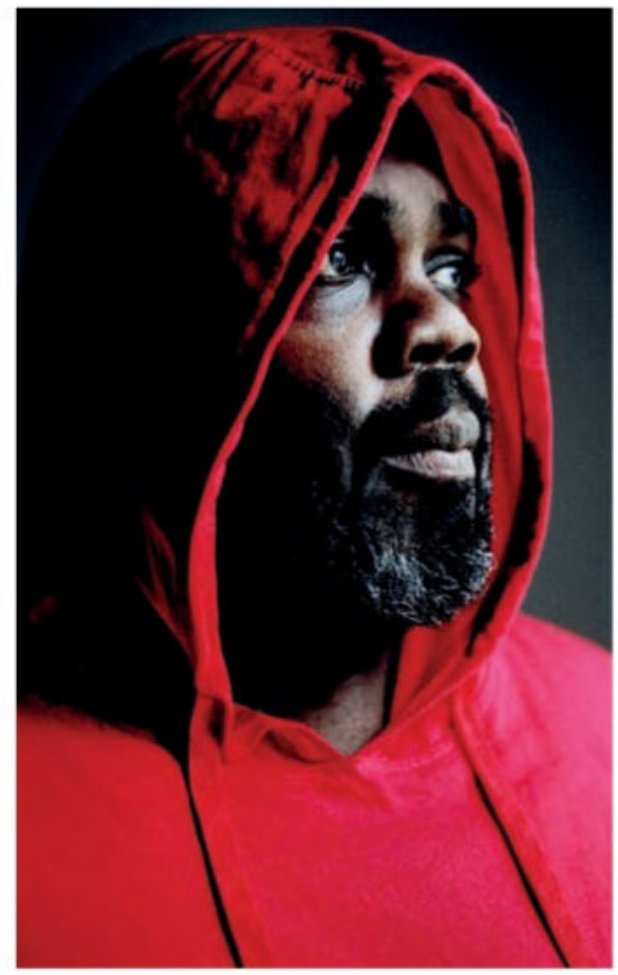
PHOTOGRAPHY: DANA VAN LEEUWEN/DECCA, MARIA IOUDENITCH, RICHARD DUMAS

GRAMOPHONE *Online*

The magazine is just the beginning. Visit **gramophone.co.uk** for ...

Podcasts

This month on the *Gramophone* Podcast we feature the countertenor Reginald Mobley, who joins us to talk about his new album 'Because', a programme of Spirituals performed with jazz pianist Baptiste Trotignon, and available on the Alpha label. He tells Editor Martin Cullingford about recording these beautiful, and moving, works, what they mean to him and what he hopes they will mean to audiences.



Reginald Mobley joins the *Gramophone* Podcast

Also on the podcast this month, James Jolly talks to the conductor Edward Gardner, Principal Conductor of the London Philharmonic and Chief Conductor of the Bergen Philharmonic. His recorded catalogue for Chandos is extensive and is crowned by the 2020 release of Benjamin Britten's *Peter Grimes*, recorded in Bergen, which was voted *Gramophone*'s Opera Award winner and Recording of the Year.

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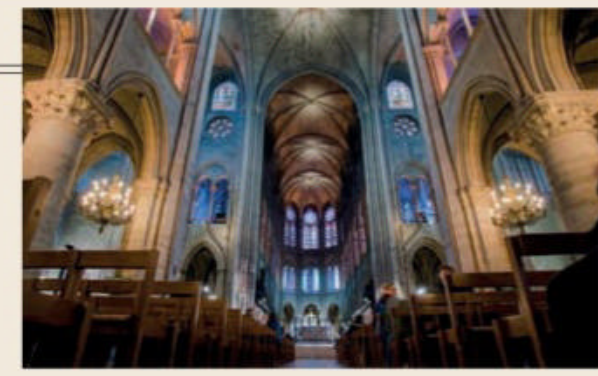
STUDIO PROFILE

Notre-Dame de Paris

In our series exploring recording venues **Tim Parry** finds out what makes this famous cathedral such a special place to record music



When the roof of the medieval Catholic cathedral Notre-Dame de Paris caught fire in April 2019, the fear of irrevocable loss was real. Thankfully, although the roof and spire were destroyed and some of the interior was damaged, structural stabilisation and a complete restoration began swiftly and the cathedral should reopen by the end of next year.

Construction of the cathedral began in 1163, and it was largely completed by 1260. Further work was carried out over the centuries, and Notre-Dame became the most visited building in Paris, attracting over 12 million people a year. Because of this constant flow of visitors – its popularity as a tourist destination and its religious function – recordings in the cathedral take place after the doors have closed to the public, just as in Westminster Cathedral and Westminster Abbey.

The recording engineer David Hinitt reflects on being alone in such a huge, sacred venue: 'Standing in the middle of Notre-Dame on your own, with all the doors locked and absolutely no one else there, it becomes a very humble place. To be in such an enormous, beautiful space on your own is a real privilege. But of course you have to set up for the recording and the hard work has to start, so you can't enjoy it too much!'

Hinitt's experience of working in Notre-Dame includes recording the organist Olivier Latry putting the magisterial Cavaillé-Coll organ through its paces. This famous instrument – which suffered water damage during the 2019 fire, although it thankfully survived – was dedicated in 1868, and has seen numerous modifications since. It is housed at the West end of the cathedral, high up so the sound expands to fill the space. In the organ loft, Hinitt reports, the sound is 'absolutely deafening – it has to be loud to fill the building. At floor level the sound just purrs away, but upstairs it's truly thunderous.'

As anyone who has walked round a large church when the organ is playing knows, the sound changes depending on where you are. Part of the engineer's job is to capture the range of colours in a single sound image that is a combination of those you can hear in different locations within the cathedral. Microphones are rigged up in the gallery and at various places down in the nave, in order to capture all the available sounds – not dissimilar to spot-miking within an orchestra. As Hinitt says, 'There is no best seat in the house; you get different colours in different places and you want to capture as many of these as you can. In a way you want to create a sound picture that is even better than listening in the place itself – or certainly something you can't recreate in the space other than by walking around. The mix of the sound is crucial – it relies on the engineer choosing the precise sound picture they want, blending the various microphones.'

Hinitt continues: 'As with recording most organs, the challenge is capturing the correlation between near and far, which determines the enjoyment of the listener. It can quickly sound like a big mush. You want the clarity of the immediate sound, but also a sense of the huge space, and these are in many ways contradictory. In the organ loft it feels like you're standing in front of an HGV travelling at 70mph, with this barrage of sound hitting you, yet downstairs it's fine. So you want to combine that immediate excitement and physical impact with the calmness of the overall sound at floor level.' This is of course something you can't easily achieve in person but can experience through your hi-fi.

Ultimately, what makes a place like Notre-Dame so special for recording is the undefinable aura that comes from working in a space that resonates with its essential purpose. 'There is a prayerfulness that hangs in the air,' says Hinitt. 'It's a wonderful feeling to do your daily job in a venue where this sense of spirituality is all around you. This is the difference between a venue like this and a concert hall.'

Praise for Tom Borrow

Pianist Tom Borrow has been named as this year's winner of the Terence Judd-Hallé Award, given to young pianists of exceptional ability, something to which its alumni list – including Nikolai Lugansky and Stephen Hough – can attest. The award includes concerto performances with the Hallé Orchestra, and is named after the British pianist Terence Judd, who died tragically early in 1982.

Stipendium for Ida Ränzlöv

The 2023 Birgit Nilsson Stipendium – first presented to a young Swedish singer by the soprano herself in 1973 – is this year awarded to Swedish mezzo Ida Ränzlöv. She receives 200,000 Swedish Crowns (around £15k) and joins an impressive list of former recipients including Nina Stemme, Anna Larsson and John Lundgren.

Psappha to close after funding cut

Contemporary music ensemble Psappha has announced its closure after 30 years, following the recent loss of funding from Arts Council England; this constituted 40 per cent of its income, and the group was unable to find other solutions to continue. Reviewing a release on NMC of a celebratory selection of its commissions last year, Richard Whitehouse wrote 'its track record in terms of commissioning or premiering [is] second to none among comparable UK ensembles.'

PHOTOGRAPHY: EUGEN WAIS, TAL GIVONY

GRAMOPHONE *talks to ...*

Stephen Williams

The director on his film about Joseph Bologne, the Chevalier Saint-George

What were the roots of the film?
I knew nothing about Joseph Bologne before I got the script – this accomplished composer, conductor, fencer, equestrian, marksman, man-about-town. So that set me off on a long journey of exploration. Then on a personal level, he came from Guadalupe, an island in the Caribbean, went to Paris and lived out his life in Europe. And I was born on another Caribbean island, Jamaica, and left home when I was roughly that age and went to school and university in England, and so there were many parallels between his life trajectory and mine. He of course was far more accomplished! But nonetheless I was able to recognise certain aspects of his journey, as an outsider, as an immigrant, as someone who exists on the margins of the culture that they found themselves in.

How did you set about recreating his character?
So much that happens in the film is historically accurate, yet Joseph Bologne left behind no letters or diaries, no direct access to his psyche, so I had to approach inventing that portion of his life with fidelity, humility and commitment to honouring the truth of what we imagine this his life journey would feel like. We knew he went to La Boëssière's Academy when he was around 10 or 12. He started on the outside of French society and ascended so effectively that he became a very close cohort of Marie Antoinette's. And yet towards the end of his life he had become so disenchanted with the monarchy, and so cognisant of all the other struggles around democracy and representation that by the time of the French Revolution he has now gotten to a place where he decides to lead the first all-black, 1000-man battalion in the Revolutionary Wars. Those two poles of his life journey gave us the pathway to trying to inscribe the evolution of a musical revolutionary.

How did you choose the music the film uses?
Part of the tragedy of Joseph's life is that a good two-thirds of his musical output has either been destroyed or lost. Huge portions of Joseph's music do play throughout the movie, but we also found incomplete pieces that two incredible composers, Michael Abels and Kris Bowers, built on in the idiom of Joseph Bologne. We tried to build a bridge between the mid-1700s and a more contemporary sound, because I wanted people to feel a sense of immediacy around the story's events.

How did you depict the music on screen?
Kelvin Harrison Jr (pictured above with Stephen Williams) worked six hours a day for six months learning how to be a virtuoso violinist before we started shooting, so there's not a single performing shot in the movie that isn't Kelvin – which is still mind boggling! I didn't want to cut away to somebody's hands because an audience would suss that out immediately, and it would become distancing.
Chevalier is in UK cinemas from June 9

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THE NEW ALBUM

PHOTOGRAPHY: LARRY HORRICKS

100. Arena di Verona Opera Festival

16. Juni/
9. September 2023

Fondazione
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OPERA

Aida
von Giuseppe Verdi
Neuproduktion
16. 17. 25. 29. Juni/ 9. 16. 21. 30. Juli/
2. 18. 23. August/ 3. 8. September

Carmen
von Georges Bizet
23. Juni/ 6. Juli/ 11. 24. August/
6. September

Il Barbiere di Siviglia
von Gioachino Rossini
24. 30. Juni/ 13. 22. Juli

Rigoletto
von Giuseppe Verdi
Neuproduktion
1. 7. 20. Juli/ 4. August

La Traviata
von Giuseppe Verdi
8. 14. 27. Juli/ 19. 26. August/
9. September

Nabucco
von Giuseppe Verdi
15. 28. Juli/ 3. 17. August

Tosca
von Giacomo Puccini
29. Juli/ 5. 10. August/
1. September

Madama Butterfly
von Giacomo Puccini
12. 25. August/ 2. 7. September

GALA

Roberto Bolle and Friends
19. Juli

Juan Diego Flórez in Opera – Arena 100
23. Juli

Plácido Domingo in Opera – Arena 100
6. August

Jonas Kaufmann in Opera – Arena 100
20. August

Teatro alla Scala in Arena di Verona
31. August

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WHAT NEXT?

In our guide to further listening, Andrew Farach-Colton takes as his starting point Copland's cowboy ballet Billy the Kid – where will his musical journey lead?

The widely disseminated drawings and paintings of life on the prairie by Frederic Remington in the late 19th century helped to shape Americans' vision of the Wild West. A few decades later, **Aaron Copland** created what would become the soundtrack for the American West in his ballets *Billy the Kid* (1938) and **Rodeo** (1942). The complete scores to both ballets are played with appropriate gusto by the **Colorado Symphony** under **Andrew Litton** on a demonstration-quality BIS recording (1/16).

Copland's ballets inspired a host of other American composers. Some, like **Morton Gould**, adopted Copland's style so closely you might think of his **Cowboy Rhapsody** (1943) as 'Billy the Kid Rides Again' or 'Rodeo Redux'. In any case, **Ian Hobson** and the **Sinfonia Varsovia** have loads of fun with it (Albany, 10/09).

Other composers took a more individual approach. **Lukas Foss** began writing his secular oratorio **The Prairie** (1942) when he was barely out of his teens. The music shows Copland's influence, though it has a more cosmopolitan flavour. **Andrew Clark** and the **Boston Modern Orchestra Project** make a strong case for the work's revival (BMOP/sound, 1/17). **Leo Sowerby**'s tone poem **Prairie** (1929) is worth hearing, too, particularly as it predates Copland's ballets. **Paul Freeman** and the **Czech National Symphony Orchestra** (recorded 1996, Cedille) revel in the music's stark, Baxian splendour.

A vision of the Wild West by Frederic Remington

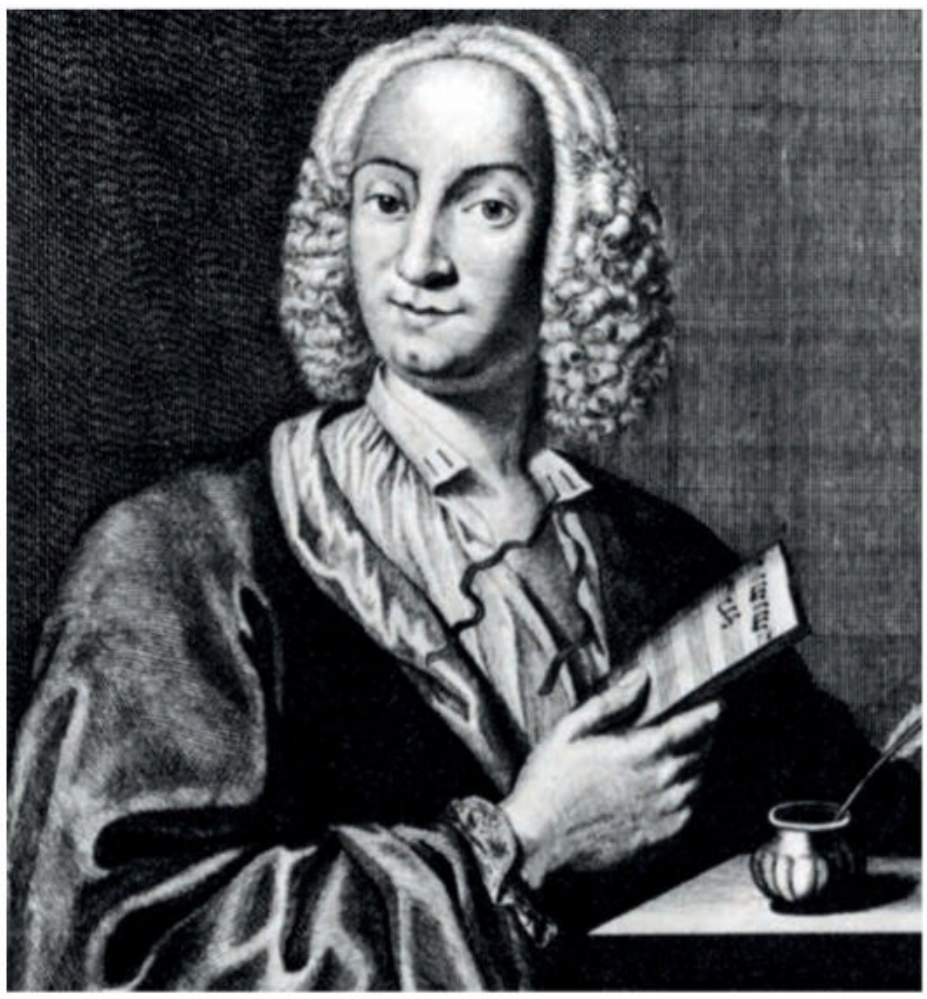
Composers in countries far from the US also took inspiration from *Billy the Kid*. **Alberto Ginastera**'s ballet **Estancia** (1941) looks at the Argentine pampas through a similar lens, and his orchestration may even outshine Copland's in its delicacy and brilliance. **Juanjo Mena** and the **BBC Philharmonic** play it for all it's worth (Chandos, 2/16)

Copland's shadow looms large over Hollywood, as is evident in the soundtracks to so many Westerns. One of the best was by **Jerome Moross** (a composer Copland greatly admired) for the 1958 epic **The Big Country**. Indeed, Moross's music is as dramatically potent as it is tuneful, and the **Philharmonia Orchestra** under **Tony Bremner** (Silva Screen, 5/89) show that this swashbuckling score is hugely enjoyable even without the visuals.

John Luther Adams isn't necessarily conjuring the American West in his **Become Desert** (2017), but certainly the shimmering, slowly shifting music suits the landscape. Is there even a trace of Copland in it? Listen to **Ludovic Morlot** and the **Seattle Symphony**'s mesmeric recording (Cantaloupe, 9/19) and decide for yourself.

GRAMOPHONE

NEXT MONTH AUGUST 2023



PHOTOGRAPHY: DAVID FINDLAY JR FINE ART; USA/BRIDGEMAN IMAGES, THE TULLY POTTER COLLECTION

Vivaldi's The Four Seasons

Three centuries on from its premiere, no other Baroque masterpiece finds such recognition and resonance with modern audiences. We talk to some of its leading performers about the work's enduring appeal, and the place it plays in their lives

Herbert von Karajan

As our special centenary series of Icons reaches the 1960s, we explore one of the most acclaimed figures of 20th-century music – and who better than the conductor's biographer, Richard Osborne, to do so?

Elgar's Sea Pictures

Which recordings of the evocative orchestral cycle most stand out from the catalogue? Andrew Farach-Colton names the finest

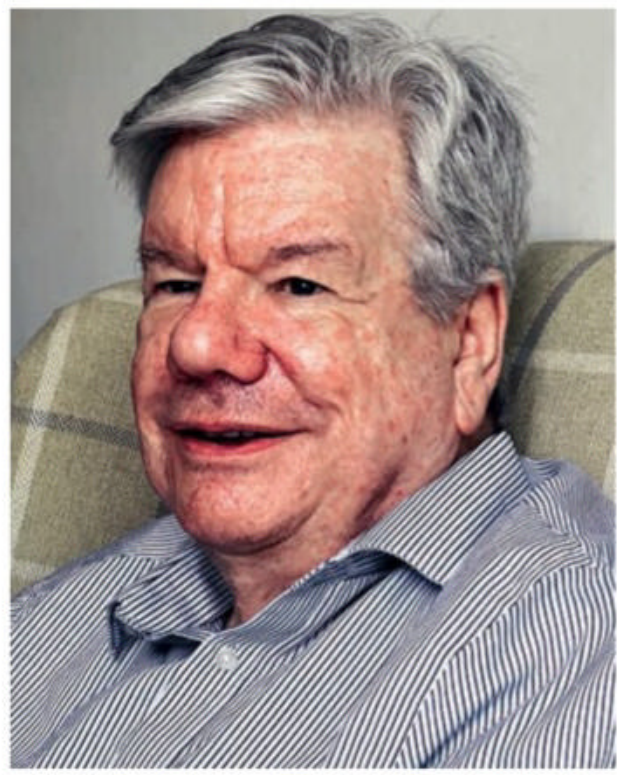
ON SALE JULY 12 DON'T MISS IT

CARTE BLANCHE

As the tenor's 85th birthday approaches, and a celebratory Schubert album is released, **James Jolly** meets **Ian Partridge** to talk about a remarkably full and rewarding career

On the wings of song

A few months ago I was chatting to Martin, *Gramophone*'s Editor, and he mentioned that Somm was bringing out an album of Schubert songs for Ian Partridge's 85th birthday. 'Do you fancy going to talk to him?', he asked. I didn't hesitate – Partridge's sweet, flexible and wonderfully expressive tenor voice has accompanied me as a teenager onwards, two LPs in particular standing out: from 1971 Vaughan Williams's *On Wenlock Edge* and other songs including the wonderful *Ten Blake Songs* for voice and oboe (with Janet Craxton) – which led to a host of concerts in 1972, the VW centenary – and a 1974 LP of Warlock's *The Curlew* and Vaughan Williams's *Four Hymns* and *Merciless Beauty*. A couple of weeks later I was drinking coffee with Partridge and his wife of nearly 64 years, Ann, at their home in Wimbledon, listening to reminiscences of a performing career that spanned 50 years, with a coda as a teacher with a close association with the Royal Academy of Music. Very soon, two hours – and much laughter – had passed …



Ian Partridge: at home in May

Ian Partridge's recorded catalogue is vast, and it's hard to think of another singer who has embraced such an astounding range of music, both in concert and on record. With Pro Cantione Antiqua he recorded numerous albums of music from the 15th century, with Walter Goehr he took part in some of the earliest attempts to revive the Monteverdi Vespers, he played the harpsichord for Alfred Deller and he recorded Bach cantatas with Ernest Ansermet ('He was over 80, I think, then. Mind you, I mustn't say that's old now! He was quite frail. And the horn player, because I did the aria with horn in Cantata No 105, was so loud. But I liked the experience of working with a musician who came from another era. Helen Watts was very kind to me. And Tom Krause was very naughty. He did the most wicked imitations of Fischer-Dieskau.'). Partridge also sang with Nadia Boulanger conducting, at Fairfield Halls in Croydon, and in Schumann's oratorio *Der Rose Pilgerfahrt* with Pierre Boulez ('It was delicious. He had a real feel for it and he said how much he loved it'), he performed and recorded with both Sir Adrian Boult (memorably in VW's *The Pilgrim's Progress*) and Sir John Pritchard, the finest accompanists he ever worked with – 'even if Pritchard never rehearsed!' And he performed and recorded extensively with his sister Jennifer as his accompanist.

Partridge's parents were both musical. 'My mother had a nice mezzo voice. My father was organist and choirmaster at St Stephen's Church, Bexhill, and had a nice, light baritone. He should have joined D'Oyly Carte; he'd have been wonderful in G&S. It was through him that I went to New College Oxford. He thought it was a good idea to go to a choir school. I was terribly nervous the first term but after that, I started to really enjoy it. HK Andrews – Herbert Kennedy Andrews – was the Director of Music, and he was very kind to me. In my last year, he taught me the piano.'

It was at New College that Partridge first met Herbert Howells. 'He used to come into my harmony lessons because he was a great friend of Andrews. And he'd written a service, as you know, for New College. And we talked about AE Housman. He'd met Housman; in fact, they had a meal together and Howells took along a sheaf of songs that he'd composed. The lunch apparently consisted entirely of Housman cursing everybody else who'd set his poems to music. He wasn't a lover of music at all, apparently. And Howells went home and destroyed all the poems that he'd set. And I could tell – and he was over 80 at this point, if not more – that it still upset him terribly that he'd destroyed them, and he obviously couldn't remember what he'd written. I thought that was terribly sad.'

Partridge then went to Clifton College in Bristol and although the school was quite sporty, the head of music, Douglas Fox encouraged him. 'I played a piano concerto in my last term, the Beethoven Third. And I kept the piano going until about 1965, and then I had to stop because you can't be doing two things well.' And it was at Clifton that he discovered Schubert. 'We had a music school and quite a lot of music there, where I found Volume One of the Schubert Peters Edition. I played it all through, over a period of time. And I just was completely bowled over by what I found. I didn't know at that time that I was going to be a singer. My voice broke when I was 13 and I couldn't sing for three years at all, not even as an alto. Dr Fox, who was an extraordinary man who'd lost his right arm in the First World War, had thought I'd be nice as an alto in the chapel choir. He was disappointed, I think. Then the voice started to come back when I was 16 or 17. We did some concerts together but he seemed to have no interest in song whatsoever. Choirs, yes, but not solo singing.'

Partridge did manage to find a singing teacher in Bristol which he enjoyed both because he could finally work on his new tenor voice, but also because it got him out of school. 'After Clifton I went straight to the Royal College of Music to study with Gordon Clinton, and that was a mistake because I should have taken a year out. I was too young. My father had spent quite a lot of money and while I was at college and living in London, he ran out of money. He couldn't support me anymore. So I left in the middle of my second year and got a job at Westminster Cathedral. And I was

Ian Partridge performing with his sister Jennifer, a partnership celebrated on the new Somm album

PHOTOGRAPHY: LIZZY DUNN-BIRCH

very lucky because George Malcolm was extremely encouraging and helped me. But of course, he left almost immediately because of problems with the hierarchy of the cathedral.'

We talk about song which Partridge always did so wonderfully – whether French, our native British tradition, or Lieder – and the revelation of Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau. 'I heard F-D first when I was 18, at the Festival Hall. Walter Legge's recitals were always there. And it was thrilling. He, and particularly Irmgard Seefried, were both revelatory. I didn't know any German at all, not a word, but I sat through these long recitals and it was so uplifting. And I knew that was something I wanted to do if I possibly could. In 2009, I'd heard him on the radio and I could tell he was very poorly, and I'd never been in touch. I had been around to see him a couple of times, but he probably wouldn't remember that. So I wrote to him and sent him a CD of Schubert, many of the songs which are on the new Somm disc, and told him what an incredible inspiration he'd been and I just wanted him to know that. And he wrote me back this wonderful letter.' A sentence of which reads 'Listening to your Schubert was and is a pure joy, for which I thank you from the bottom of my heart: you got just the right feeling for these jewels.'

Mining the BBC archives, the Somm collection contains 20 Schubert songs: two in which he's partnered by Ernest Lush, but the bulk are with his sister Jennifer, who is four years younger than Ian. 'Well, it all started at the Hastings Music Festival when I was 18, and I won the silver medal. Jenny and I did "Go, lovely rose" by Quilter and "Crabbed age and youth" by Parry, two songs I still love to this day. "Go, lovely rose" Jenny and I did at our last recital at Westminster. I think it's a beautiful song. And it was through Quilter, Gurney and Finzi that I seriously got into song. And Jenny was also into all those composers, and we just found that we gelled. I can't really explain why that was. Is it a brother and sister thing? I don't know, but what was so wonderful about working with her was that she was always there. With me at every moment.'

There's also a trio of Schubert songs which finds Partridge as both singer and pianist. 'That was through a man called Tony Friese-Greene, who was a BBC producer,' Partridge recalls, 'and he did a series of six programmes, "Double Exposure" with people who did two things. And Tony asked me to take part. So I accompanied myself in Schubert and Brahms. There was a wonderful balance engineer at the BBC called Geoff Tims, and he called me One Take Partridge because we very rarely had to do a re-take, but that means there are little errors which people will pick up on, I'm sure. And some of the performances are live, so there are always odd errors. But they're just snapshots, aren't they, on the day?' But he enjoyed recording – 'I loved the red light! The minute it came on I was there!'

I have to ask him about a couple of song recordings that were always mentioned in the pages of *Gramophone* when I was a teenager – Schubert's *Die schöne Müllerin* and then Schumann's *Dichterliebe* and the Op 39 *Liederkreis* – which owed their existence to the producer John Boyden. 'He rang up [the artist managers] Ibbs & Tillett, who were looking after me at that time, and talked to Mrs Tillett. "I want to use Ian Partridge for a recording, with his sister, of *Die schöne Müllerin*." And apparently she said to him, "You know Richard Lewis is back in the country now?" And tried to sell him Richard Lewis. Other people might have been influenced by that, but he said, "No, I don't want Richard Lewis," and she had to agree. It's going to be reissued as a double album in John Boyden's memory. He was just an amazing man. These things all happen by chance. You don't plan them. I was always told that I never pushed myself forward, but I couldn't. That was just how I was.'

The day after our conversation, I received an email from Ian. 'One thing I forgot to mention: my love for singing the Evangelist in the Bach Passions. This came about through Paul Steinitz choosing me. He had always used Germans before. He did one of the Passions in London and in German annually (most performances were still sung in English at this time). Singing for Paul was always a highlight. Alas, I never got to record the *St Matthew* although I did "Evangelise" for Harry Christophers in the *St John*.'

'Stimme der Liebe', Songs by Franz Schubert, an 85th birthday tribute to Ian Partridge from the BBC archives, is released by Somm on June 16

NOTES & LETTERS

Write to us at St Jude's Church, Dulwich Road, London SE24 0PB or gramophone@markallengroup.com; email is preferable at this time

Gramophone's 100th concert

Firstly, may I congratulate you on the wonderful 100th birthday concert at Wigmore Hall which I came to and enjoyed enormously – it was a magnificent line-up of artists, a really varied programme and there really wasn't a weak link – and James Jolly's narrative was perfectly judged and told the *Gramophone* story economically and with evident pride.

All the artists performed magnificently – it was very difficult to single out a favourite (Alina Ibragimova and Cédric Tiberghien were wonderful in the Debussy Violin Sonata, Miloš was his usual suave, and charming, self in the Mathias Duplessy piece, Iestyn Davies and Carolyn Sampson sang beautifully, Martin James Bartlett and Jean-Efflam Bavouzet drew fabulous sounds from the Yamaha piano, and the superb Bertrand Chamayou brought the house down with Liszt's *Venezia e Napoli*. But, for me, Karim Sulayman and Sean Shibe won my heart – and I think most of the audience's – for their group of Sephardic and Arabic songs. Unexpected, intimate, magical and incredibly moving.

Imagine then my surprise at reading Alexandra Coghlin's rather cool review of their 'Broken Branches' in the June issue (page 82). Personally I found Mr Sulayman's voice very beautiful and entirely appropriate for these delicate songs. I really hope others will not be put off sampling this imaginative and original album. Even the rather hackneyed *Concierto de Aranjuez* gains new life in their gorgeous arrangement.

Luke Spencer
Watford, Herts

James Bowman for tea

Comments on James Bowman's personality, in both the May obituary and Iestyn Davies's commentary (pages 11 and 17), brought to mind my encounter with him some years ago, in the tea room of the Historic House where my wife and I were custodians. The facility was normally reserved for our visitors only, but a signal, from my wife in the ticket office, said she had decided we could accommodate someone passing, looking for a good-quality cup of tea on his way to perform in a concert. She thought that, in my other role of chair of a local concert society, I might be interested.

On sight I thought I recognised, but could not immediately place, the face. As we chatted he said he was on his way to the Budleigh Music Festival to perform that evening. No, I said regretfully, we didn't have tickets for the concert. As he left, I checked online for who was performing, and realised, from our CD recordings of The King's Consort, that this had been James Bowman. I managed to get two of the few remaining tickets and we found ourselves that evening on the far end of the front row. As the performers came out, James Bowman was glancing around and, as he spotted us, a huge beam of delight appeared on his face. At the interval, as soon as they had all trooped off, he was back out to find and chat with us; what a wonderful personality indeed.

Stephen Huyshe-Shires
Sidmouth, Devon

James Bowman in the choir

It is possibly less known that in retirement James Bowman sang with the Choir of the Chapel Royal.

At a 2007 memorial service in Inigo Jones's Queen's Chapel of St James's, my father, who greatly admired the noble line

Letter of the Month

Britten at The Maltings at Snape

Britten surveying the ruins at Snape following the 1969 fire

The article on the Snape Maltings (May, page 10) immediately brought to mind the newspaper photos of a devastated Benjamin Britten standing in the midst of the ruins after the disastrous fire of 1969 (two years after its opening).

As a schoolboy in the early 1960s and studying the First World War poets, the newly written *War Requiem* added a depth of pathos to the words of Wilfred Owen. The innovation of interspersing the Latin Mass with his poems sent shivers down the adolescent spine. It also led to a life-long appreciation of Britten's music.

Of course the basic restoration of The Maltings was covered by insurance but the inevitable public appeal allowed important other work to happen. As a student I sent what could be no more than ten bob (50p) in response. Imagine my surprise a few weeks later to receive a reply in Britten's own hand along with an invitation to share in the 1970 Aldeburgh Festival as a Hesse student. Sadly this proved impossible as the festival clashed with my finals!

Many years later I was able to visit the Maltings and also to stand at the side of the graves of Britten and Pears with their eloquent yet simple headstones. Perhaps a drop or two of the water for the sprinkler system came from that 50p!

Stuart Edwards
Morecambe, Lancs

RAYMOND WEIL
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Each Letter of the Month now receives a RAYMOND WEIL *toccata* classic wristwatch RRP £595

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of countertenors, and was the subject of the gathering, would have been deeply moved, as we were, to witness Bowman in his surplice and red cassock but towering over his treble companions as he swept in and out in brisk procession.

The Voice of Apollo re-adapting with wisdom, and so modestly, to Byrd and Gibbons.

Charlie Millar
By email

Gramophone in my life 1

In its 101st year *Gramophone* retains the power it has always had over this reader to interest, influence and inspire. John Steane and Alan Blyth are much-missed sirens, who launched a thousand LP and CD sales. The advent of Editor's Choice and Contemporary Composers has latterly added serendipty and adventure to CD and download purchases. Reading Andrew Achenbach's review the new Rubbra songbook 'The Jade Mountain' made me wonder wither the art of reviewing. For unfamiliar works, thorough descriptions of the works are helpful, but as AA points out detailed notes are included in the booklet for this release. I wanted to read about the exciting line up of performers and their contributions, which will ultimately define the lasting value of the endeavour. 'Outstanding sympathetic performances, one and all,' left me feeling rather short changed. I bought the CD nonetheless: AA had done enough to entice and the power of *Gramophone* reigns.

Matt Tozer
By email

Gramophone in my life 2

I first began subscribing to *Gramophone* in the 1990s at a time when the author Patrick O'Brian was publishing the last of his nautical historical novels. Both the latest issue of the magazine and the newest book arrived by mail in a time before the ability of logging in to the postal service to see what was about to be delivered, which meant always keeping a sharp ear out for the mail truck. My only fear was that both publications might arrive the same day, leaving me the dilemma of which one to open first. Whichever I chose, much of the reading was done before I came back indoors. *Gramophone* remains a faithful guide for listening to music unknown to me or selecting a recommended version of a beloved piece.

Scott Culclasure
Greensboro, NC, USA

OBITUARIES

GRACE BUMBRY

Mezzo-soprano
Born January 4, 1937
Died May 7, 2023

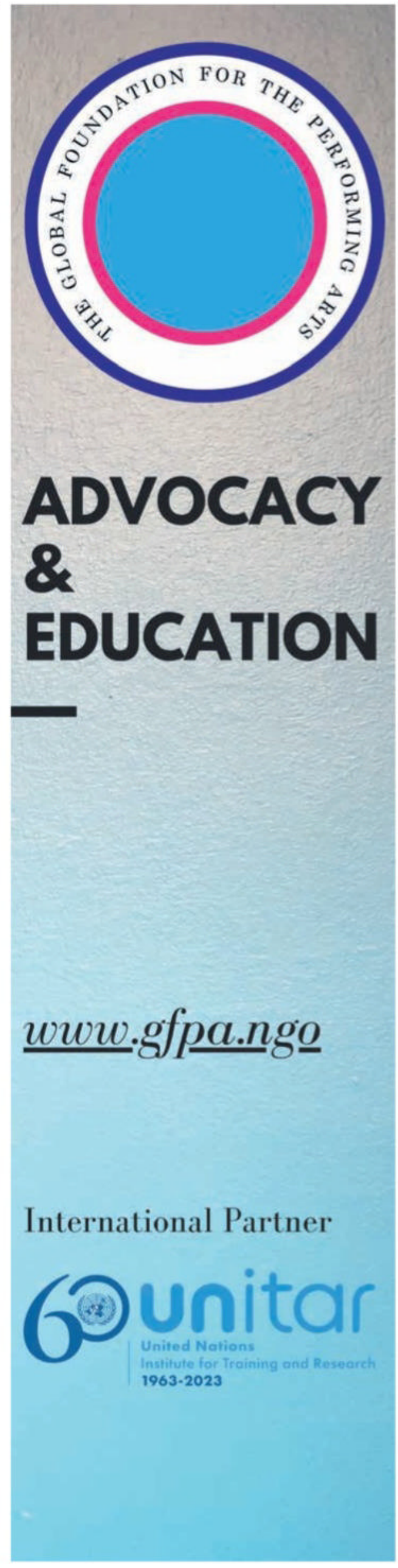
Grace Bumbry, who has died at the age of 86, was among that generation of African-American singers, along with Leontyne Price (born 1927), Shirley Verrett (born 1931) and Martina Arroyo (born 1937), who followed in the footsteps of Marian Anderson, and who conquered the great operatic stages of the world.

Born in St Louis, Missouri, Bumbry started out playing the piano but was inspired by Anderson to switch to the voice. She studied at the Charles Sumner High School in St Louis and after winning a singing competition won a scholarship to the St Louis Institute of Music, an institution that did not accept Black students. Embarrassed, the competition organisers arranged for her to appear on Arthur Godley's Talent Scouts radio programme where she sang 'O don fatale' from Verdi's *Don Carlo*. As a result she had the opportunity to study at the Boston University College of Fine Arts. She then transferred to Northwestern University where she met Lotte Lehmann, who encouraged her work with her in Santa Barbara in California. They worked together for three years.

In 1958 Bumbry won joint first place with Arroyo at the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions. That year she made her recital debut, in Paris, where she also made her operatic debut as Amneris in *Aida*. She joined the company of Basel Opera where she stayed for four years and sang Carmen, Dalila, Orfeo (Gluck) and Verdi's Lady Macbeth and Azucena.

Her international breakthrough, which was also a cause célèbre, was when she appeared, the first Black singer, at Bayreuth in 1961 as Venus in Wieland Wagner's production of *Tannhäuser*

PHOTOGRAPHY: CLIVE STRUTT



(conducted by Wolfgang Sawallisch – a live recording is available from Orfeo). The following year she sang *Carmen Jones* in London and then, in 1963, she made her Covent Garden debut as Eboli, alongside Boris Christoff and Tito Gobbi, in *Don Carlo*.

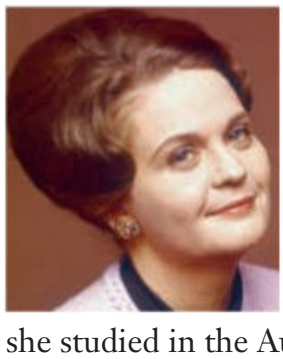
Other major debuts followed: in 1964 in Vienna (as Santuzza) and in Salzburg (as Lady Macbeth), in 1965 at the Met (as Eboli). 1966 saw her sing Carmen with Karajan in Salzburg, and also in San Francisco; that year she made her debut at La Scala, Milan (as Azucena).

The 1970s saw her taking on a number of roles usually sung by sopranos – Salome, Tosca, and Leonora (*Il trovatore* and *La forza del destino*), Abigaille (*Nabucco*), La Gioconda, Elisabeth (*Tannhäuser*) and Elviras (*Ernani*). She also sang both Norma and Adalgisa. In 1990 she returned to Paris for the opening of the Opéra-Bastille singing Cassandre and Didon (alternating with Shirley Verrett) in Berlioz's *Les Troyens*. At the end of her career she sang a number of more 'character' roles including Monisha in Scott Joplin's *Treemonisha*, the Old Lady in Bernstein's *Candide* and the Countess in Tchaikovsky's *Queen of Spades* (Vienna, 2013).

Her recorded legacy tends to capture her in her prime, and as a mezzo: Handel's *Messiah* under Boult (Decca), two studio recordings of *Carmen* (for video with Karajan/DG and for audio with Rafael Frühbeck de Burgos/EMI – as well as a live Salzburg recording from 1967 under Karajan), *Don Carlo* (DVD under Levine at the Met), Amneris, twice, opposite Leontyne Prince's Aida conducted by Leinsforf (RCA) and with Birgit Nilsson conducted by Mehta (EMI), Massenet's *Le Cid* (Eve Queler for CBS/Sony Classical). Outside opera, she recorded Falla's *El amor brujo* (under Maazel for DG) and the Mozart Requiem (under Klemperer for EMI). There are numerous 'off-air' recordings that well capture the excitement of her live performances.

INGRID HAEBLER

Pianist
Born June 20, 1929
Died May 14, 2023



The Austrian pianist, known for her recordings of Mozart in particular, has died at the age of 93. Born in Vienna, though raised in Poland from the age of three to 10, she studied in the Austrian capital as well as in Salzburg, Geneva and Paris (with Marguerite Long). Her career stretched from the 1950s to '80s, and she recorded extensively for Denon (the complete Mozart piano sonatas and most of the concertos) and Philips, including a second set of all the Mozart piano concertos (with the LSO under Galliera, Rowicki and Colin Davis) – of which Trevor Harvey in October 1968 wrote 'her playing is crystal clear, always stylish, and has a classical line. She is obviously devoted to Mozart and her performances are always, even at their least good, the result of thoughtfulness.' She also recorded the complete Schubert piano sonatas. She formed a duo with the violinist Henryk Szeryng with whom she recorded Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert sonatas. Her recorded legacy for Philips runs to 58 CDs and was reissued in 2022.

MENAHEM PRESSLER

Pianist
Born December 16, 1929
Died May 6, 2023

Menahem Pressler, who has died aged 99, was a founding member of the Beaux Arts Trio, remaining with the ensemble throughout its entire 53-year existence, a half-century of success chronicled by a catalogue of acclaimed Philips recordings.

The trio had been formed in 1955, Pressler joining with violinist Daniel Guilet and cellist Bernard Greenhouse. Renown swiftly followed – both on stage and in the studio. As recently as February this year they were described in our pages as 'the archetypal piano trio', and Pressler, the piece also noted, 'whose radiant piano playing reflects his sparkling, ebullient nature, is the most voluble and jocular member of the ensemble.' (In subsequent years, Guilet was succeeded by Isidore Cohen then Daniel Hope, while Peter Wiley and Antonio Meneses followed in Greenhouse's footsteps.)

Born Max Pressler in Germany, his family's shop was attacked on Kristallnacht; while he and his immediate family managed to escape Nazi Germany – ultimately reaching Palestine – his uncles, aunts, cousins and grandparents were killed in concentration camps. Aged 17, he changed his name to Menahem, the Hebrew word for comforter.

Studies at Tel Aviv Conservatory led, in 1946, to a move to America and success in the Debussy competition in San Francisco. Concerto performances followed – including his US debut, Schumann's Piano Concerto with the Philadelphia Orchestra conducted by Eugene Ormandy, at Carnegie Hall – as well as recitals, and by the founding of the Beaux Arts Trio almost a decade later he was already a successful performer as well as teacher, having begun a life-long association with Indiana University.

The great piano trios of the Classical and Romantic eras lay at the heart of their repertoire: it was with Haydn trios that they won *Gramophone*'s 1979 Recording of the Year. Reflecting on the set in our pages, Robin Golding said: 'The completed venture must be counted as one of the most remarkable and successful achievements in the history of the gramophone record.' Beyond the core trio repertoire, however, their recordings embrace music by Hummel, Arensky, Clara Schumann, Turina, Korngold, Zemlinsky, Ives, Rochberg, Baker and Rorem.

When the Trio retired in 2008, Pressler – by this stage 85 – did not, returning to solo performance. He later quipped that 'When I was awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award from *Gramophone* in 1998, I remember asking them if that meant I had to stop playing – because if that were the case I wouldn't accept it. Luckily they said I didn't! And after watching a solo recital DVD I made thereafter, one *Gramophone* reviewer commented that it was a pity I didn't start a solo career sooner. So that is why at this point in my life I am.'

Pressler performed in Germany on the 70th anniversary of Kristallnacht, and in 2013, aged 90, made his debut with the Berlin Philharmonic, in Mozart's Piano Concerto No 17, conducted by Sir Simon Rattle. That year also saw a release of a well-received recording of Beethoven, Mozart and Schubert on La Dolce Volta label. Other recordings, both solo and collaborations, followed, a live recording of Mozart's Piano Concerto No 27 released in 2018, finding Jed Distler praising 'Pressler's hypnotic legato, concentration and sustaining power'.

Pressler married Sara Scherchen in 1949 and they had two children; she died in 2014. His partner since 2016 was Annabelle Weidenfeld, to whom he dedicated an album of Debussy's music two years later, on DG. Listening to *Clair de Lune*, JD found that 'one hangs on every note with bated breath, from Pressler's perfectly placed pianissimos to the disembodied shimmer of his ever-so-slightly desynchronised chords,' concluding that for the 94 year old, it marked 'an auspicious Deutsche Grammophon solo debut.'

PHOTOGRAPHY: DECCA, UNIVERSITY JACOBS SCHOOL OF MUSIC

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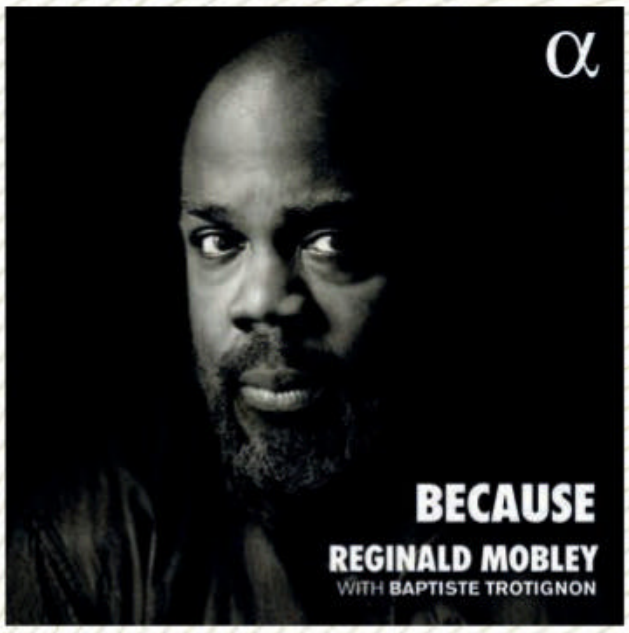

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HANDEL

Six Years in a Life

Many milestones marked this great man's work. **Richard Wigmore** hones in on some particularly defining ones – all involving oratorios and operas – to offer a focused and in-depth view

Philippe Mercier's portrait of Handel composing at the keyboard, c1725 (oil on canvas)

1707

Never lacking *savoir faire*, the young Handel appears to have set out to become the supreme musical cosmopolitan. In autumn 1706, aged 21, having had a thorough grounding in the contrapuntal tradition of his native Saxony, he travelled from Hamburg to Italy 'on his own bottom' (that is, at his own expense) – as his first biographer, John Mainwaring, delightfully put it.

Journeying via Florence, he arrived in Rome towards the end of 1706, where he immediately dazzled cognoscenti with his keyboard prowess. Dubbed 'Il caro Sassone' ('The beloved Saxon'), Handel was evidently an expert networker, attracting the patronage of the Marchese Francesco Ruspoli and the worldly, vastly wealthy cardinals Pamphili and Ottoboni. One contemporary curtly described Ottoboni as 'without morals, without repute, debauched, decadent, a lover of arts and a fine musician'. According to Mainwaring, Ottoboni organised a trial of strength at his Palazzo della Cancelleria in which Handel slugged it out with another young keyboard lion, Domenico Scarlatti: first on the harpsichord, where opinion was divided, then on the organ, where Scarlatti himself graciously conceded defeat.

St Peter's Square, Rome – the city where in 1707 Handel attracted the patronage of the Marchese Francesco Ruspoli and the wealthy cardinals Pamphili and Ottoboni

PHOTOGRAPHY: NPL - DEA PICTURE LIBRARY/BRIDGEMAN IMAGES, CHRISTIE'S IMAGES/BRIDGEMAN IMAGES

Remaining in Rome until he left for Florence in November 1707, Handel honed his mastery of fluid, long-arched Italianate melody in reams of solo and duet cantatas. Many of these miniature unstaged operas were unfurled at gatherings of the Arcadian Academy in the Marchese Ruspoli's gardens on the Aventine Hill. On a far ampler scale was Handel's debut oratorio, *Il trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno*, to a text by Pamphili. In 1703 the pope had banned opera as a corrupting force. Opera-starved Romans could console themselves with the brilliant colours and teeming energy of Handel's allegorical drama. Typically, the hedonists, Beauty (Bellezza) and Pleasure (Piacere), get most of the best tunes, including Pleasure's ravishing sarabande 'Lascia la spina', later recycled as 'Lascia ch'io pianga' in Handel's first London opera, *Rinaldo*.

While precise details are sketchy, we know that in the spring and summer of 1707 the Lutheran Handel composed psalm settings for the Catholic liturgy. It was perhaps for the Carmelite church of Santa Maria di Monte Santo that he wrote his *Laudate pueri*, *Nisi Dominus* and the grandest of his Roman sacred works, *Dixit Dominus*. From its stupendous opening chorus onwards, *Dixit Dominus* – a sumptuous concerto for voices and orchestra that, then and now, pushes singers to the limits – is more daring and theatrically flamboyant than any of Handel's other works. In the late autumn of 1707, shortly after composing the elaborate pastoral cantata *Clori, Tirsi e Fileno* (in which the shepherdess Clori calls all the shots), Handel left for Florence to direct his first opera for Italy, *Rodrigo*. Zigzagging across the Italian peninsula, he was back in Rome by March 1708, where at Easter he revealed another oratorio, *La resurrezione*. Lavishly presented at Ruspoli's place, this unstaged sacred opera proved the biggest triumph of his glittering Italian career to date.

RECOMMENDED RECORDING

Il trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno
Deborah York, Gemma Bertagnolli *sops*
Sara Mingardo *contr* Nicholas Sears *ten*
Concerto Italiano / Rinaldo Alessandrini *org*
Naïve (6/01)

1711

The climax of Handel's Italian sojourn came with the performance of his opera *Agrippina* in Venice in December 1709. In Mainwaring's words, 'The theatre, at almost every pause, resounded with shouts and acclamations of *viva il caro Sassone!*' Armed with letters of recommendation, Handel travelled via Innsbruck to Hanover, where in June 1710 he became Kapellmeister to the elector (the future George I) on terms so favourable as to stretch credulity: a generous salary plus 'leave to be absent for a 12-month or more if he chose it, and to go whithersoever he please'. Four months later, in October, it pleased Handel to travel to London, lured by the city's new craze for Italian opera.

Italian opera's naysayers derided this vastly expensive import as degenerate and effeminate. It quickly ignited a toxic mix of xenophobia, homophobia and anti-Catholic paranoia. In a later pamphlet, *Plain Reasons for the Growth of Sodomy*, the writer thundered that Italian opera would sap the nation of her 'manhood' and 'empire'. London's elite were undeterred. Handel's arrival in London could not have been better timed. In Mainwaring's words: 'Many of the nobility were impatient for an Opera of his composing.' That opera was *Rinaldo*, the first-ever Italian opera written expressly for London

Queen's Theatre, London: Handel's Italian opera Rinaldo was premiered here in 1711

and premiered at the Queen's Theatre, Haymarket, on February 24, 1711.

Rinaldo's plot – a sub-Ariosto mishmash of love, sorcery and Christian triumphalism set during the Crusades – is full of absurdities and muddled imagery. No matter: audiences went wild over both the music and the impresario Aaron Hill's no-expense-spared staging, with its mermaids, fire-snorting dragons, spectacular transformations and even a flock of live sparrows. But things could, and did, go wrong, to the delight of the editors of the satirical magazine *The Spectator*. When at one performance the stagehands forgot to move the wing flats, their glee was unbounded: 'We were presented with a prospect of the ocean in the midst of a delightful grove … I was not a little astonished to see a well-dressed young fellow, in a full-bottomed wig, appear in the midst of the sea, and without any visible concern, taking snuff.'

There are profounder, more dramatically coherent Handel operas, but few have as many showstoppers as *Rinaldo*. The whole score teems with invention and the sheer exuberance of youth. Never one to waste a good tune, Handel recycled many of the arias from music he had composed in Italy. Most famously, 'Lascia la spina' from *Il trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno* became Almirena's lament 'Lascia ch'io pianga'. It was an immediate hit, and has never looked back.

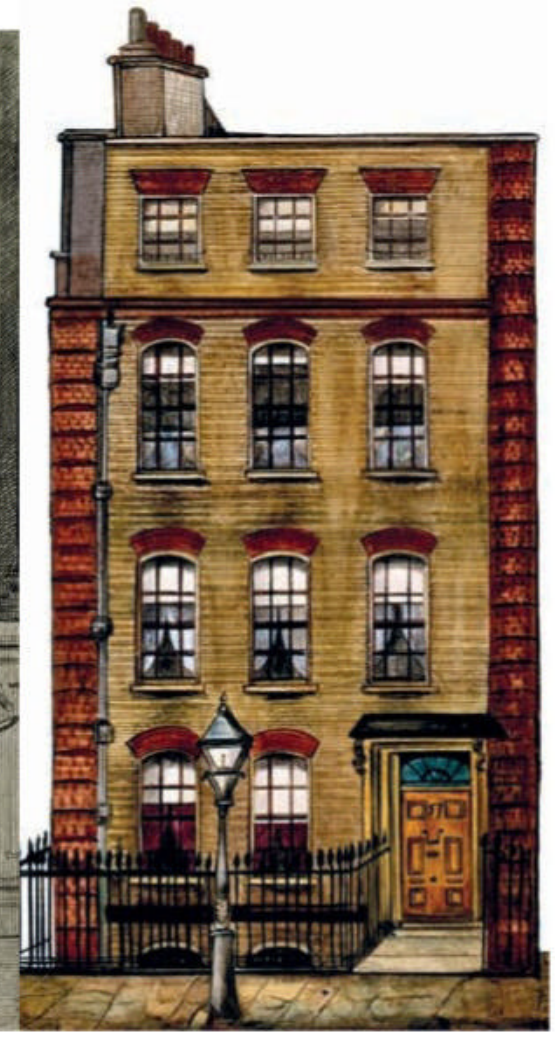
Rinaldo had decisively put London on the European operatic map. It was also a source of patriotic pride, as voiced by Charles Burney: '[*Rinaldo*] is so superior in composition to any opera of that period which had ever been composed in England, that its great success does honour to our nation.'

Before he returned to Hanover in June 1711, Handel took his leave of Queen Anne, who, as Mainwaring reported, expressed 'her desire of seeing him again. Not a little flattered … he promised to return, the moment he could obtain permission from the Prince, in whose service he was retained.' True to his word, Handel returned to London in autumn 1712, this time for good.

RECOMMENDED RECORDING

Rinaldo
David Daniels *counterten* Cecilia Bartoli *mez* Gerald Finley *bar* Luba Orgonasova *sop* Bejun Mehta *counterten* et al; Academy of Ancient Music / Christopher Hogwood
Decca (1/01)

PHOTOGRAPHY: LONDON METROPOLITAN ARCHIVES/BRIDGEMAN IMAGES



From left: caricature of a scene possibly from Flavio, 1723 (Senesino, Cuzzoni and (Gaetano) Berenstadt); image of 25 Brook Street, London, where Handel lived from 1723

1723

By July 1723, newly installed in his spacious house in Brook Street, Mayfair, Handel had settled into a more-or-less regular routine. Mainwaring cites his 'noble spirit of independency'. Yet Handel was always careful to maximise his professional options. Since moving permanently to London he had been a de facto court composer without holding a formal post. In February 1723 he had become 'Composer of Musick' to the Chapel Royal, a virtually honorific position that carried an annual pension of £200. That was topped up by another £200 after his appointment as music master to the royal princesses, Anne and Caroline. Anne, especially, would become an enthusiastic patron of his music.

But the day job throughout the 1720s was opera. In 1719 a group of noblemen had raised more than £20,000 by subscription to set up the Royal Academy of Music at the (renamed) King's Theatre, Haymarket. King George I pledged £1000 a year. Armed with a virtual blank cheque (and he needed it!), Handel set off to scout for singers on the Continent. His prize catches were the Siennese castrato Francesco Bernardi (known as Senesino), and the soprano Francesca Cuzzoni. Each commanded an eye-watering salary of 1500 guineas. Senesino made his Handel debut in the 1720 revival of *Radamisto*. Cuzzoni, under contract in Venice, arrived in time for the premiere of *Ottone* in January 1723.

Prima donna and castrato were both singers with attitude. But they more than met their match in Handel, who according to Mainwaring threatened to defenestrate Cuzzoni unless she agreed to sing the gently touching aria 'Falsa imagine'. Ironically, this aria made Cuzzoni's London reputation as a soprano without equal in the 'pathetic' style.

With a run of 14 performances, *Ottone* was an emphatic success. In spring 1723 Handel followed it with the relatively brief *Flavio*, which mingles *opera seria* heroism with a vein of ironic comedy. To judge by its eight sparsely attended performances, Londoners were unenthused.

Immediately after his move to Brook Street in summer 1723, Handel embarked on his most sumptuously scored Royal Academy opera, *Giulio Cesare in Egitto*. Premiered on February 20, 1724, with Senesino and Cuzzoni in the plum roles of Caesar and Cleopatra, it scored a triumph to rival those of *Rinaldo* and *Ottone*. The Handel scholar Winton Dean memorably summed up *Giulio Cesare* as 'a glorification of sexual passion uninhibited by the shadow of matrimony'. In the obligatory Baroque makeover of history, Caesar is transformed from cynical middle-aged tyrant into idealistic youthful hero, while Cleopatra is at once the 'immortal harlot' (Dean) and, in her piercing arias 'Se pietà' and 'Piangerò la sorte mia', a potentially tragic heroine.

With *Tamerlano* and *Rodelinda* following in 1724-25, Handel was on an operatic roll. Through his dramatic flair and powers of melodic invention he had raised the exotic, vastly expensive Italian import to a new artistic level; and for the moment, at least, he had eclipsed his rival Giovanni Bononcini in public favour.

RECOMMENDED RECORDING

Giulio Cesare in Egitto
Kristina Hammarström *mez* Emanuela Galli *sop* Mary-Ellen Nesi *mez* Irini Karaianni *mez* Romina Basso *mez* et al; Orchestra of Patras / George Petrou
Dabringhaus und Grimm (8/10)

1738

In the spring of 1737 the hitherto robust Handel suffered from what a contemporary called a 'paralitick disorder'. His right arm was immobilised, and there are reports that his mind was affected. In September he travelled to Aix-la-Chapelle (aka Aachen) to take the sulphur baths. In Mainwaring's words, 'His cure, from the manner as well as from the quickness, with which it was wrought, passed with the nuns for a miracle.'

After his cure and return to London, Handel was back at full throttle, perhaps with a point to prove. With the unveiling of

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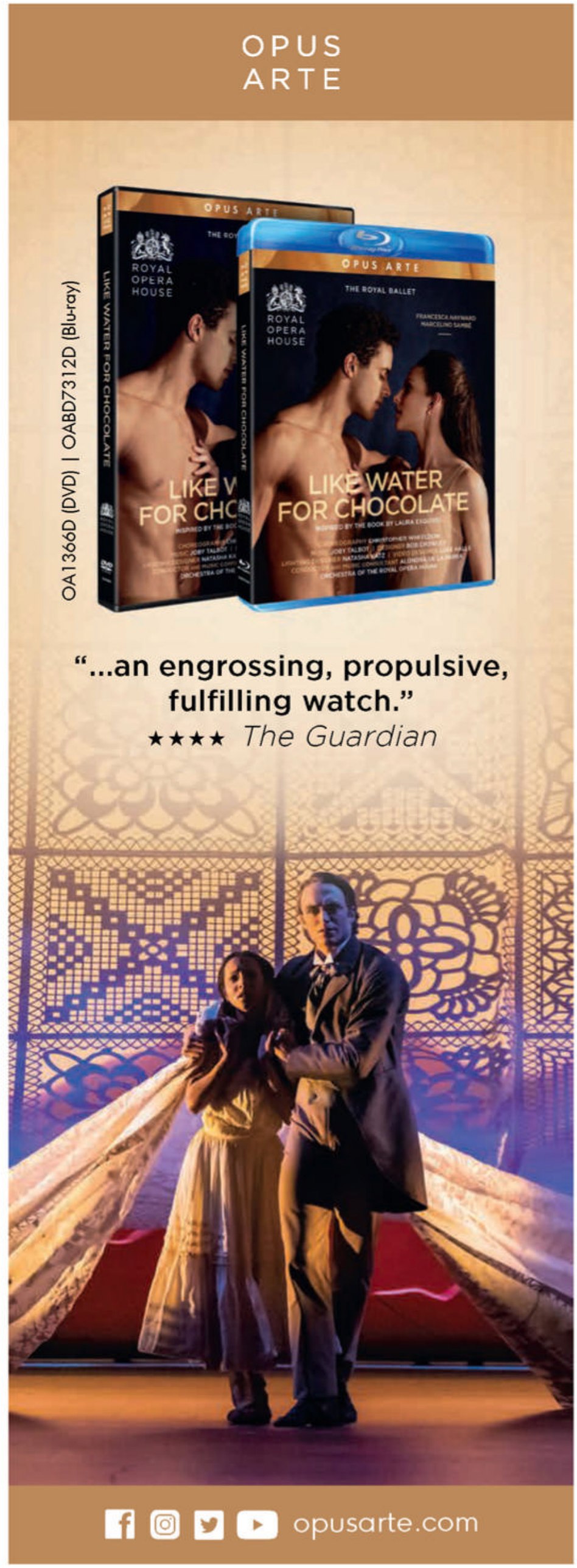
Handel's frequent librettist Charles Jennens (portrait by Mason Chamberlin the elder)

Louis-François Roubiliac's statue of him at Vauxhall Gardens in May 1738, he had become, literally, a national monument. Yet this was also something of a watershed period. With the fickle London public tiring of Italian opera, and his finances in a parlous state, Handel now wavered between opera and English oratorio.

Arguably his most fertile year ever, 1738 began with a pair of operas. Launching the King's Theatre season, the dramatically garbled *Faramondo* enjoyed fair success (dramatic coherence was never an audience priority). Handel's next opera, *Serse*, netted just five performances and was never revived. What Burney dubbed *Serse*'s 'mixture of tragic-comedy and buffoonery' evidently fazed audiences weaned on full-blown *opera seria*. History, though, has had its revenge; and today *Serse* rivals *Giulio Cesare* and *Alcina* as the Handel opera most likely to fill a theatre. Beginning with the famous 'Ombra mai fù' (slowed and solemnised as 'Handel's Largo'), it moves with mercurial swiftness through a gamut of moods, from farce to narrowly averted tragedy. In *Serse*, too, we sense Handel mocking the formal conventions of *opera seria*.

After *Serse*'s failure, the tide began to turn. For the following season Handel kept his options open, creating two mighty oratorios, *Saul* and *Israel in Egypt*, and drafting a new opera, *Imeneo*. *Saul* was Handel's first collaboration with the lordly, irascible Leicestershire squire Charles Jennens. Planning a work on the grandest possible scale, the composer threw himself into the oratorio with reckless enthusiasm. According to the *London Daily Post*, *Saul*'s premiere at the King's Theatre on January 16, 1739, 'met with general Applause by a numerous and splendid Audience' – as well it might have done. *Saul*'s Shakespearean breadth, psychological insight and orchestral opulence make it one of Handel's supreme achievements. Although Saul himself has no full-blown aria, his outsize, brooding presence, culminating in his terrible final lucidity at Endor, gives the oratorio a unique tragic power.



PHOTOGRAPHY: GERALD COKE HANDEL COLLECTION, FOUNDLING MUSEUM/BRIDGEMAN

On October 1, 1738, just a few days after finishing *Saul*, Handel plunged into the equally massive *Israel in Egypt*. The score draws liberally on music by earlier composers, though Handel usually repays his borrowings with interest. With its vividly pictorial evocations of the plagues and the parting of the Red Sea (Handel must have had fun with these), *Israel in Egypt* unfolds as a series of grand choral frescoes. It failed with audiences who preferred their moral edification leavened with what one writer called 'pleasing airs of the stage'. Conversely, its glorious opportunities for a full-throated vocal workout made it a staple of Victorian choral societies, preferably with a cast of hundreds.

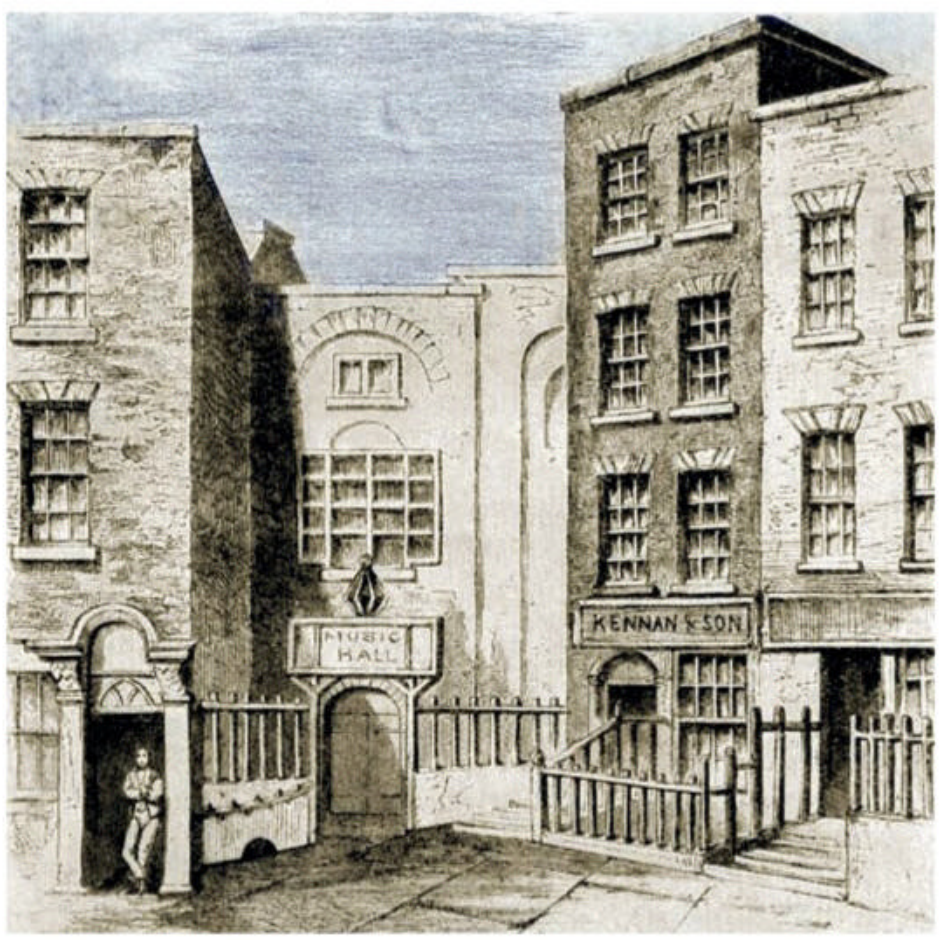
RECOMMENDED RECORDING

Saul
Elizabeth Atherton, Joélle Harvey *sops* **Sarah Connolly** *mez* **Jeremy Budd, Mark Dobell, Robert Murray, Tom Raskin** *tens* **et al; The Sixteen / Harry Christophers**
Coro (10/12)

1741

This was the crunch year. Opening at Lincoln's Inn Theatre on January 10, Handel's final opera, *Deidamia* (an ironic take on the Greek myth of Achilles's boyhood), was a resounding flop. Like its predecessor *Imeneo*, it has an agreeable lightness of touch, but except for the French soprano Elisabeth Duparc (La Francesina) in the title-role, the cast was indifferent; and after three patchily attended performances even Handel had to accept defeat. Thirty years after the triumph of *Rinaldo*, his future lay elsewhere.

Never one to kowtow, Handel had made plenty of enemies during his volatile opera career. He had stubbornly resisted attempts by noblemen to secure him for their opera companies. For the moment he seems to have retreated from public view. In early July 1741 he amused himself by writing a series of Arcadian chamber duets. Later that month Jennens wrote to his friend Edward Holdsworth: 'Handel says he will do nothing next Winter, but I hope I shall perswade him to set another Scripture Collection … I hope he will lay out his whole Genius & Skill upon it, that the Composition may excell all his former Compositions, as the Subject excells every other Subject. The Subject is Messiah.'



Drawing by FW Fairhold of the Dublin venue where Messiah had its premiere in 1742

After receiving Jennens's text Handel quickly responded with: 'What I could read of it in haste, gave me a great deal of Satisfaction.' In a surge of activity phenomenal by even his standards, he drafted the score of *Messiah* between August 22 and September 14, 1741. Four of the choruses, including 'For unto us a child is born', fruitfully recycle music from the Arcadian duets. After a few days' break he plunged into another biblical oratorio, *Samson*, destined to become one of his most reliable bankers. Jennens expected *Messiah* to be unveiled at a London benefit concert. Handel had other ideas. Taking up an invitation from the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, in early November he set off for Dublin, boarding the packet boat at Parkgate on the River Dee.

Far removed from London's commercial maelstrom, Handel relished the flourishing concert life in what he called 'that most Generous and Polite Nation'. In December, his Miltonic ode *L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato* (composed the previous year) delighted audiences at Dublin's new Musick Hall on Fishamble Street. Four months later, on April 13, 1742, a capacity house heard the premiere of *Messiah* at a charity matinee there. The response was ecstatic, as evidenced by the Dublin press: 'The Sublime, the Grand, the Tender, adapted to the most elevated, majestick and moving Words, conspired to transport and charm the ravished Heart and Ear.'

Back in England, Jennens took it as a personal slight that Handel had taken his 'Scripture Collection' to Ireland. After attending *Messiah*'s London premiere, on March 23, 1743, he conceded grudgingly to Holdsworth that "Tis, after all … a fine Composition, notwithstanding some weak parts, which he was too idel [*sic*] and too obstinate to retouch.' Obstinate, perhaps, but hardly 'idel', Handel 'retouch'd' *Messiah* to the point where there is no definitive version. Yet Jennens always remained dissatisfied with the work that within Handel's lifetime became a national icon.

RECOMMENDED RECORDING

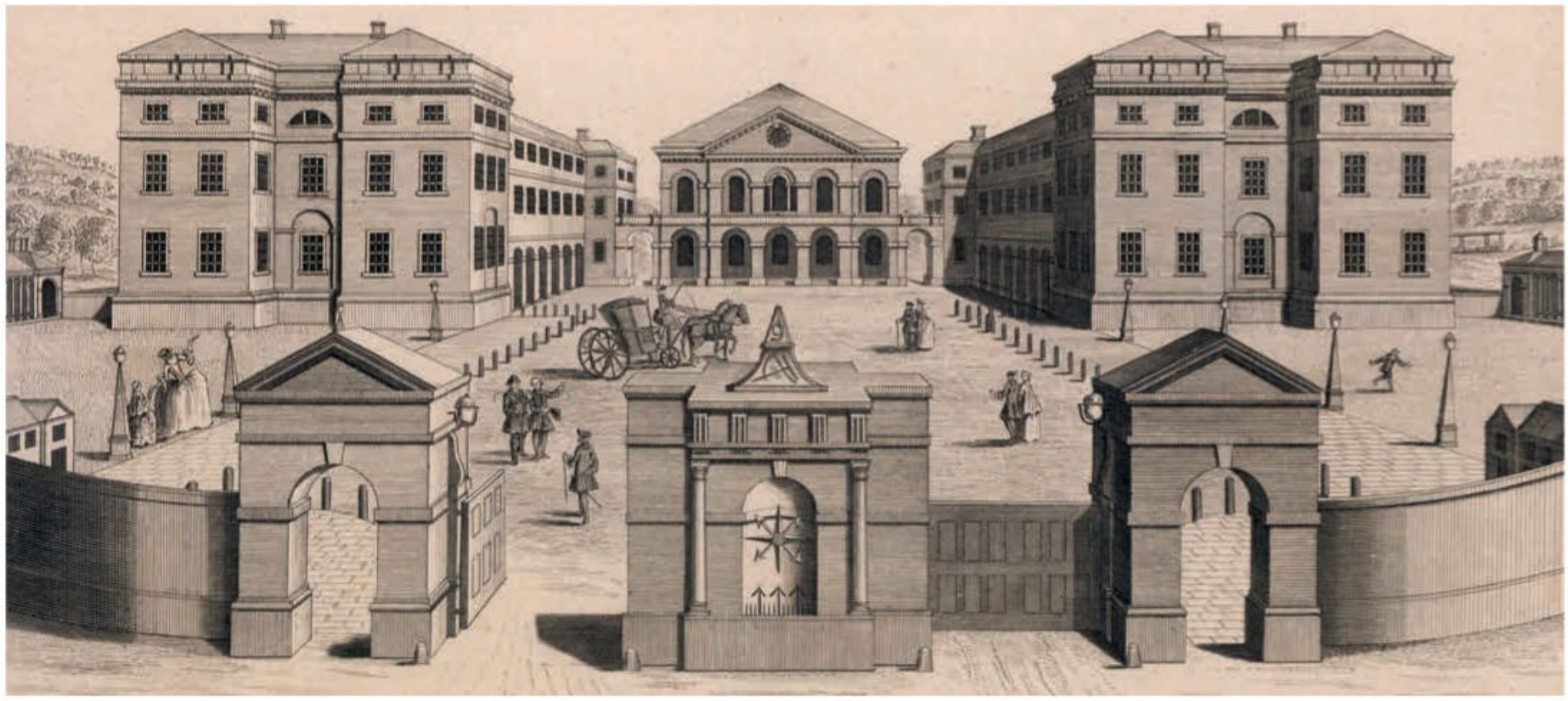
Messiah
Arleen Auger *sop* **Anne Sofie von Otter** *mez* **Michael Chance** *alto* **Howard Crook** *ten* **John Tomlinson** *bass*
The English Concert / Trevor Pinnock
Archiv (11/88)

1751

Beginning with *Samson* and *Messiah* in 1743, Handel typically presented two new oratorios during Lent at the state-of-the-art Covent Garden Theatre in London. He twice paired a biblical drama with a work based on Greek mythology: *Semele* in 1744, *Hercules* the following year. His greatest public successes tended to be the most bellicose: *Samson*, and the so-called 'victory oratorios' – *An Occasional Oratorio*, *Judas Maccabaeus* and *Joshua*, all of which rode the wave of nationalist feeling following 'Butcher' Cumberland's victory at Culloden.

Amid his triumphs, Handel had long been inured to failure. In 1750, his penultimate oratorio, *Theodora*, lasted just three performances, prompting Handel to quip that, 'The Jews will not come to it … because it is a Christian story; and the Ladies will not come because it [is] a virtuous one.' However, a prime reason for *Theodora*'s failure was surely its unique reflective inwardness, culminating in a rare tragic ending.

PHOTOGRAPHY: LEBRECHT MUSIC ARTS/BRIDGEMAN IMAGES



'A View of the Foundling Hospital' (1756) in London – engraving by Benjamin Cole

Thomas Hudson's portrait of John Beard (c1717-1791), Handel's favourite tenor

Unbowed, Handel planned a new oratorio for the 1751 season. But whereas he habitually composed during the lighter months, he only began *Jephtha* in January 1751, after spending the late summer and autumn in Germany. On his journey back to London, he was injured when his coach overturned between The Hague and Haarlem, but he evidently made a full recovery. On February 16, his friend the Earl of Shaftesbury reported: 'Handel himself is actually better in health and in a higher flow of genius than he has been for several years past. His late journey has helped his constitution vastly.'

Ironically, on the score of *Jephtha* three days earlier Handel had scrawled (in German) after the first section of the chorus 'How dark, O Lord, are thy decrees': 'Reached as far as this on February 13, 1751, unable to continue due to the weakening of the sight of my left eye.' He resumed work on February 23, his 66th birthday, but got only as far as the end of this monumental chorus. His shaky writing betrays the effort involved.

Handel rapidly lost the use of his left eye altogether. Yet after spa cures in Bath and Cheltenham, he finally completed *Jephtha* on August 30. By the time he directed its premiere on February 26, 1752, he had been diagnosed with incipient glaucoma. A year later, a London newspaper reported that 'Mr Handel has at length, unhappily, quite lost his sight'.

Destined to be Handel's last completed work, *Jephtha* is the most personal of his many oratorios set against the background of Israelite oppression and ultimate triumph, shorn, as usual, of the Old Testament's murky ethics. What absorbed Handel was the plight of the oratorio's innocent victims, and the larger theme of man's inevitable submission to an unfathomable destiny. 'How dark, O Lord, are thy decrees' – perhaps Handel's greatest tragic utterance – culminates in a stark setting of Alexander Pope's maxim, 'Whatever is, is right.' As many commentators have suggested, Handel was mindful here not only of the appalling predicaments of Jephtha and his daughter Iphis, but also of his own affliction and enforced submission to destiny.

By his final decade, Handel's oratorios had become a national institution, the blind composer on occasion treating audiences to one or more of his organ concertos between the acts. From 1750, annual performances of *Messiah* at the Foundling Hospital raised huge sums for charity. Handel left a copy of the score and parts to the hospital in his will, ensuring that performances could continue after his death. Fittingly, *Messiah* was the last music he heard, just eight days before he died at his home in Brook Street on April 14, 1759. G

RECOMMENDED RECORDING

Jephtha
Sophie Bevan, Grace Davidson *sops* **Susan Bickley** *mez* **Robin Blaze** *counterten* **James Gilchrist** *ten* **Matthew Brook** *bass* **The Sixteen / Harry Christophers**
Coro (9/14)

PHOTOGRAPHY: LOOK AND LEARN/PETER JACKSON COLLECTION/BRIDGEMAN IMAGES, GERALD COKE HANDEL COLLECTION/BRIDGEMAN IMAGES

THE ART OF THE SONG RECITAL

The programming of art songs can be a challenge, especially in terms of repertoire and sequencing. **David Patrick Stearns** talks to leading pianists, singers and composers shaping the tradition for today – on stage and on record

An enviable mutuality: Carolyn Sampson and Joseph Middleton in recital

More than ever, vocal recitals arrive with a mission: dispelling pandemic isolation, endorsing social justice and, as ever, fostering reappreciation and rediscovery of great music touched by the voice.

Requiring only a fraction of opera-performance machinery, vocal recitals aren't simply star singers working solo. This highly specific medium morphs every which way, with new outspoken repertoire, an influx of vocal talent from the early-music community and liberated performance manner. Yet art song maintains its identity – as pianistic as it is vocal, as literary as it is musical, with all elements fusing into a place where audiences better know the artists, the art and even themselves. No scenery. No costumes. No barriers between artists and audience.

'It does things that other art forms can't do. Profound statements of love, death and nature … the absolute magic of song … even if written by some chap who died 200 years ago,' says pianist Joseph Middleton, one of the busiest song accompanists and Director of Leeds Lieder, whose festival this June has 36 events (twice that of last year) in a 'who's who' line-up including soprano Véronique Gens, mezzo Dame Sarah Connolly and tenor Mark Padmore but also talent that breaks from tradition. Consider Errollyn Wallen, the Belize-born composer, singer and pianist whose pieces defy classification – with serious lyrics, harmonic freedom beyond Debussy and music so eventful as to be miniature tone poems, with titles such as *Are You Worried about the Rising Cost of Funerals?* (1994).

Among current vocal recitalists and audiences, none of this is very surprising. 'What you have to say is almost as important as who is saying it,' says tenor Nicholas Phan, the seasoned American recitalist whose focused, Bach-friendly voice also accommodates Schumann's classic song-cycles. Another Bach singer, German baritone Benjamin Appl has been touring a programme titled Nocturne which tells darker stories through Czech composer Ilse Weber, who was murdered at Auschwitz. In Appl's words, the programme shows how 'people retreated into themselves to write music as an escape'. But William Bolcom's breezy, roguish *Song of Black Max* is also on the programme. Nocturnal concerts also require light – if not a sunrise.

'Anything is possible,' says the pianist and longtime song accompanist Malcolm Martineau, 'if you tell a good story and make the poetry come alive.' Opera fans may debate if words or music are more important, but the art-song community agrees that the poetry remains the expressive priority. 'I tell that to my masterclasses … to help them think about what the music starts off with,' says pianist Jeff Cohen, whose recordings include the complete songs of Reynaldo Hahn; 'and that

PHOTOGRAPHY: WIGMORE HALL

accommodates more personal self-expression for performers and more intimate communion with audiences.'

Some poems, however, are more timeless than others. Steven Blier included the dark-humoured Tom Lehrer song *Poisoning Pigeons in the Park* (1959) in his New York Festival of Song concerts, though when a birdwatcher took offence, Blier began questioning if that kind of humour made his programmes too brittle. It's like this, he says: 'When you ask people over to your house, you aren't going to serve them flat water and crackers.'

Conviction is an absolute essential in recitals, in performances where singer and pianist make space for each other in tiny, intricate ways while colouring vowels and inflecting the bass lines. 'It's a collaboration like no other,' says composer and pianist Jake Heggie, who is best known for writing operas such as *Dead Man Walking* but who has lost count of his song-cycle output. 'A great recitalist isn't going to take on something that they can't inhabit fully. If it's a Schubert song-cycle, Schubert is in the house, because the voice is so alive and clean that it feels like a world premiere all over again.'

Schubert has plenty of company these days – animated company, with tenor Ian Bostridge departing from the crook of the piano and prowling the stage, or, in other concert repertoire, mezzo Joyce DiDonato pounding on the stage floor for emphasis. Schubert is also joined by lesser-known composers on the fast track to standard repertoire. One particularly dramatic instance is *The Seal Man* by British-American composer Rebecca Clarke, whose strangely ecstatic scenario has a paranormal being claiming the body and soul of a vulnerable woman. It has leapt out of obscurity in roughly five years, and not just in recordings: 'Every student I teach in masterclasses brings me *The Seal Man*,'

Martineau tells me. Equally entrancing Clarke ballads are emerging too.

Other discoveries need more special care. The delicate songs of Fernand de La Tombelle (1854-1928) had a welcome resurrection on the Aparté label (7/17; featuring baritone Tassis Christoyannis and Cohen) with help from the composer's family estate. The songs later spread to other recitals by singers such as Gens. But while recording 'Reynaldo Hahn: Complete Songs' on four discs (Bru Zane, 3/20), Christoyannis and Cohen hit snags: some of the songs were not fully finished. With estate permission, Cohen filled in the blanks. It happens. With older, lesser-known repertoire, Phan has had to create his own editions from manuscript just to see what the music offers.

The bigger challenge, though, is coaxing relevance out of such long-hidden musical niches. Cohen seems ideally suited to the task: 'It takes more time,' he explains. 'I had a piano teacher who always thought it was more interesting to work on music that was less excellent – as a way of approaching a masterpiece.'

Thank goodness the masterpieces aren't Beethoven's, whose often-awkward song output turns up only during anniversary years for a reason: 'It never feels good to sing,' confirms Phan.

Top: Gerald Moore accompanies Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, 1967
Bottom: Geoffrey Parsons with Elisabeth Schwarzkopf in 1977

Singers are traditionally the driving force behind song recitals – it's one of their few chances for artistic autonomy; pianists, however, are the organising force. According to Martineau, mezzo Susan Graham will tell him: 'You know my voice; make me a programme.' Heggie is used to singers coming in with a set programme – no doubt including some of his compositions. Soprano Carolyn Sampson and Middleton have enjoyable afternoons, reading through songs together with enviable mutuality. 'She can sight-read anything you put in front of her,' says Middleton. 'Sometimes singers are accompanying you as much as you're accompanying them.'

Tenor Lawrence Brownlee, whose voice is tooled more for Rossini coloratura than it is for recitals, wouldn't wait for composers to address the 21st-century African American experience in song. He has premiered pieces with a speed not possible in opera. He started in 2018 with *Cycles of my Being* by Tyshawn Sorey, a composer who was previously known mostly in experimental circles but found a more mainstream audience through song. Since then, Brownlee has assembled the programme Rising, pairing older song repertoire by Robert Owens and Margaret Bonds with newly commissioned songs by Damien Sneed, Brandon Spencer and others set to the words of poets such as Langston Hughes from the Harlem Renaissance (1920s). Having toured the programme earlier this year, Brownlee recorded it for June release (Warner).

In no way, however, is the standard repertoire being displaced. At least 15 new recordings of Schubert's *Winterreise* have come out since 2021 (with new relevance in the loneliness of lockdown?). One highlight of Middleton's Leeds line-up is a rare, post-retirement appearance by a legend from generations past: mezzo Dame Janet Baker in conversation, in conjunction with a screening of the film *Janet Baker: In her Own Words*, celebrating her patrician artistry and timeless repertoire. 'There's always going to be a space, a thirst and a need for that,' says Middleton.

Despite such bursts of activity, the art-song world has historically existed on a slippery slope. By their very definition, song recitals can't be mounted at London's expansive Royal Albert Hall and still be what they are. They also require commitment on the part of presenters. Soprano Elisabeth Schwarzkopf once recalled that even when vocal recitals were at a popularity peak in wartime Berlin, 'Concert organisers were not charitable institutions. If we didn't bring the money in, then we wouldn't be asked again.' Martineau encourages the long view. He has played to full audiences at sizeable venues in, for example, Toulouse which didn't develop overnight: 'If they have enough money to lose a little to start with and can stick with it, they will get there in the end.'

Each art-song entity has its own distinctive identity, allowing them to build synergy in a sprawling global community. In the UK, Oxford Lieder hosts two weeks of singers and pianists every October with around 50 concerts. The BBC Cardiff Singer of the World competition, held every two years starting in 1983, launched the careers of baritones Dmitri Hvorostovsky and Bryn Terfel, and in 1989 introduced the Lieder Prize (later renamed the Song Prize), won by singers including soprano Elizabeth Watts.

Also held every two years, the Wigmore Hall/Bollinger International Song Competition handed out nine prizes to promising singers in 2022, including special repertoire prizes for Schubert Lieder and British song. Such singers, with any luck, will continue visiting Wigmore Hall, an ideal showcase venue where recitalists launch, consolidate and culminate what can be a 30-year career in song – with BBC broadcasts and Wigmore Hall Live recordings.

On the Continent, the Aix-en-Provence Festival academy hosts 10 singers and three pianists during a three-week residency, exploring works in a variety of languages,

in conjunction with performances by seasoned artists such as baritone Christian Gerhaher as well as star singers not necessarily associated with recitals, such as sopranos Asmik Grigorian and Pretty Yende. Austria's Schubertiade festival in Schwarzenberg and Hohenems (running from April to October) most resembles the Leeds festival with its star-vocalist line-up, but the audience rapport has special energy, with native German-speaking listeners who know every word.

Across the pond, Minneapolis's history of modern song – thanks to local composers Libby Larsen and Dominick Argento – continues in the Source Song Festival, which celebrates its 10th anniversary in August 2023 by hosting a 10-member faculty including Larsen, tenor Anthony Dean Griffey and pianist Warren Jones to work with vocalist-pianist pairs and several composers ('a Manhattan experience at Minneapolis prices,' is how Artistic Director Clara Osowski describes it). The Collaborative Arts Institute of Chicago (of which Phan is Artistic Director) had newly discovered songs by Florence Price in its four-day September 2022 festival, plus various Lieder Lounge concerts presented at different times of the year. In Bethesda, Maryland, the Boulanger Initiative (named after Lili and Nadia Boulanger) offers performers access to a database of works by women and gender-marginalised composers. Of 8000 pieces, 83 are songs.

'Sometimes singers are accompanying you as much as you're accompanying them' – Joseph Middleton, song accompanist

Such ever-expanding repertoire possibilities pose the vexing challenge of how to sequence them on a concert programme or recording. The mezzo Lorraine Hunt Lieberson is credited with breaking the last rule in concert programming by presenting composers in non-chronological order – maybe starting with Mahler and ending with Mozart – and making it work. Now that every programme is its own ecosystem, the sequence can form a make-or-break concert.

Of his far-reaching New York Festival of Song concerts, Blier says: 'Starting out, I need to know four things: what the first song is, the last song, the midpoint (is there an intermission?) and the encore.' The wrong pairing of songs, says Middleton, 'can cancel out the magic in each of them. Or you can elevate both of them and hold up some kind of mirror so that both of them are shown in a new light.' Blier indicates that songs must 'talk to each other'. And at Philadelphia Chamber Music Society, the conversation was slavery in a Singing Freedom mini-festival this year that included a full choir. Also in Philadelphia, the Lyric Fest concert series has programmes that aren't just themed but have between-song readings, maybe letters, or biographical accounts – and not on obvious subjects. The programme A Singer's Singer, for instance, documented the Paris salon of Winnaretta Singer (of the Singer Sewing Machine fortune) with a programme of music she commissioned from the Debussy–Satie generation.

What a contrast all this is to the Schubertiades of the early 19th century that were what we'd now call a free-for-all – marathon-length events, not concerts so much as private salons, presenting Schubert works of all kinds. By the 1930s and '40s, when the repertoire evolved from folk-rooted strophic songs to more searching through-composed works by Hugo Wolf, composers were clumped together in like-minded song groups.

Radio was a breakthrough. At a time when international vocal careers were launched by a Berlin recital (including Americans

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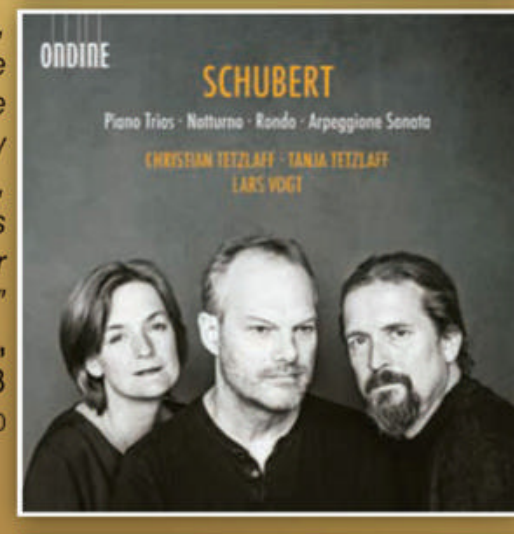

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Top, from left: Blier, Leonardo Granados, Rebecca Jo Loeb, Rupert Boyd (New York, 2021); inset: Martineau

such as contralto Marian Anderson), the pianist Michael Raucheisen (1889-1984) developed a catalogue mentality. As head of Berlin Radio's chamber music and song department from 1940, he recorded more than a thousand songs – ostensibly for broadcast – in his massive Lied der Welt (Song of the World) project. Singers included Schwarzkopf, bass-baritone Hans Hotter and tenor Peter Anders. Long tainted by their proximity to Nazism, these recordings are a time capsule showing singers articulating the texts with spontaneous vitality while the rubato-prone Raucheisen created undulating accompaniments. The 66-CD box-set of Raucheisen recordings from Membran (12/05) had a particular impact on Martineau: 'If you aim for one expressive goal for the song, you don't do too much too early on.'

The completist mindset continued with comprehensive, composer-based LP sets by baritone Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau and Gerald Moore (1950s to 1970s). Durable longtime partnerships – baritone Pierre Bernac and Francis Poulenc, baritone Gérard Souzay and Dalton Baldwin, Schwarzkopf with Geoffrey Parsons, tenor Peter Pears and Benjamin Britten, soprano Galina Vishnevskaya and Mstislav Rostropovich – maintained their own sense of well-sequenced recitals in concerts and recordings, reminding listeners that song recitals existed first and foremost to be enjoyed.

Pianist Graham Johnson formed the Songmakers' Almanac (1976-2011) with founding members Felicity Lott, Ann Murray, Anthony Rolfe Johnson and Richard Jackson. They pioneered a mixture of composers, solos, duets and ensembles in programmes recorded under evocative titles: 'Voices of the Night', 'Souvenirs de Venise' and 'Voyage à Paris'. Johnson has remained a hugely influential figure.

Out of left field came Palazzetto Bru Zane, Centre de Musique Romantique Française, inaugurated in 2009 and dedicated to the rich but under-recorded French period from 1780 to 1920. Curiously headquartered in Venice but regularly mining the Bibliothèque National in Paris for long-forgotten works, Bru Zane has issued more than 50 handsomely designed recordings, mostly opera but also the complete Hahn songs plus volumes by Franck and others performed by Christoyannis and Cohen. 'Some people find that French song is not as interesting as the Lieder of Wolf and Brahms,' says Artistic Director and musicologist Alexandre Dratwicki. 'It's very good music that touches listeners directly. If you understand who sang these French songs, if you connect the music with known places, suddenly they make sense.'

The packaging includes 180-page books with archival photos, paintings and portraits that sketch a visual counterpart to the music. The releases are in a class of their own in other ways too. Profit expectations are such that less than only 25 per cent of Bru Zane's annual budget of four million euros comes from the sales. As a non-profit-making foundation, Bru Zane also receives credit when its research has contributed to like-minded recordings on other labels. When Canada's ATMA Classique was readying the 13-CD Massenet complete *mélodies* for voice and piano for release last year, Dratwicki intentionally avoided repertoire duplication and chose to complement it with recordings of Massenet orchestral songs.

Bru Zane's recent eight-CD set 'Compositrices: New Light on French Romantic Women Composers' includes songs by Farrenc, Jaëll, Montgeroult, Viardot and many others. 'From now on, there will be no excuse for ignoring Romantic women composers,' reads the promotional material. Most important, the depth of context in the packaging restores lost meaning to old works on a level few have attempted.

At the other end of the spectrum, New York Festival of Song's recent album 'Black and Blue' with tenor Joshua Blue and Blier – its title-song written by Fats Waller – uses context to give new meaning to music of a relatively recent era, and in arrangements including bass and drums. This is art song? In a world that's rarely been so aware of racial injustice, does the protest song *Strange Fruit*, about racially motivated lynchings in the Deep South, become a miniature epic – as art songs are – that looks unflinchingly on a Goya-esque portrait of death? Well, yes. Yes, indeed! G

PHOTOGRAPHY: CHERYLYNN TSUSHIMA. BRITTEN-PEARS FOUNDATION/BRIDGEMAN IMAGES

TAKE FIVE

The acclaimed quintet Onyx Brass have been together for 30 years, and to mark the occasion they've commissioned an array of composers for a new NMC album. **Richard Whitehouse** meets some of those involved in this celebratory project – and finds out about some of the music

PHOTOGRAPHY: THOMAS BOWLES

Has the brass quintet come of age in the three decades since Onyx Brass appeared on the UK music scene? Its latest release, 'The Sun Is Free to Flow with the Sea', is its second collaboration with NMC and surely its most off-the-wall album yet in terms of repertoire. All apart from the first and last pieces are for the standard line-up (two trumpets, horn, trombone and tuba), but could not otherwise be more diverse either in content or conception. For Amos Miller, Onyx trombonist and commissioning catalyst, there was little doubt as to which composers should be included.

'The commissioning project came together quite organically. The composers featured are in two broad categories: those whose music we've admired from afar for a long time and those who are friends from projects where we've worked alongside them, mostly as performers, in a huge variety of other contexts. One of the silver linings for UK musicians – who need a portfolio of ways in which to make a living from their art – is discovering hidden talents among their friends and colleagues; in the case of those heard here, it's composition!'

Unlike the related ensembles of orchestral brass and brass band, with their antecedents in the concert hall or community, the brass quintet arose out of specific developments in the actual instruments. French violinist and composer Jean-François Bellon wrote a dozen quintets for brass in the late 1840s, but it was the Russian musician and engineer Victor Ewald who laid the basis for the medium (albeit with cornets rather than trumpets and tenor horn instead of trombone) with his four quintets from the turn of the 20th century. It was not until after the Second World War that the formation became standardised, largely owing to the numerous American ensembles that appeared in the 1950s – not least the New York Brass Quintet, for whom Malcolm Arnold wrote his First Brass Quintet in 1961. Just why the piece has proved so effective is explained by Edward Gregson, who followed in Arnold's wake six years later with his own Brass Quintet. 'I'd only heard Arnold's quintet when I wrote mine, but later I heard John McCabe's *Rounds* as well as Joseph Horovitz's *Music Hall Suite*, both of which are really good pieces. That the Arnold has remained the most famous piece for the medium is partly because it was written by a composer who, being a trumpet player himself, understood the medium perfectly. It works so well on every level. My own quintet was written after working directly with brass students from the Royal Academy of Music and is full of what, at the time, were "exotic" effects only possible from knowing what they could do when pushed. So, you could say that it was a case of a student experimenting with his compositional toolbox and having fun in the process.'

How interesting, then, that of the eight works for this medium on the new Onyx release, only one is designated a 'Brass Quintet' – that being the first such piece by Simon Dobson who, in the booklet notes, explains how he attempted to follow in the footsteps of greats like the Sonata (1965) for brass quintet by Derek Bourgeois, and classic works by the likes of Arnold and Gregson. While there are the standard three movements, the angle of approach taken with each of these makes for a distinctive take on familiar formal and expressive procedures.

Far removed from this abstraction is *Music for my Stolen Breath* (2022) by Yshani Perinpanayagam, whose avoidance of niches, and moving between genres, was almost bound to make for one of the most arresting contributions to this collection. Not that she was a 'wild card' in any sense. 'It helped knowing that the ensemble already knew me a little, so therefore Onyx must have been asking me on purpose! That's not to say there weren't times when I thought, "Why me? Do they already know what piece they want me to write?" But that line of thinking only led to some truly terrible compositional ideas! Eventually, the fact that I don't fully belong to any sub-genre within music felt quite helpful. Given how rich the repertoire for brass quintet already is, it was liberating to accept that I'm not directly descended from any one of these giants but from a variety of places with no specific shoes to fill. The quintet canon is hugely varied, so by bringing all the different bits of me into this piece, I felt I could honour this aspect.'

Not so different in this respect is Bobbie-Jane Gardner, a composer whose own forays into mixed media and cross-genre forms stem from the music she listened to

'The most rewarding aspect of the hundreds of concerts we've done is that we almost always include at least one contemporary piece' – *Amos Miller, trombone*

from an early age and that can be heard unashamedly in her 2021 piece *Up on the Toes (the Slippery Stair Dance)*. 'My music naturally intersects with the musical environment of my childhood, a soundtrack of '60s R&B and soul, which I was immersed in while growing up. During my compositional studies, I found myself more hesitant in drawing from black music – not through the views of any of my tutors (including Joe Cutler, Michael Wolters and Howard Skempton), who always encouraged me to be me, but rather through a lack of confidence. I'm now, unapologetically, drawing on these musical styles more directly and intentionally – frequently in subtle ways.'

For Emily Hall, on the other hand, the Onyx commission (*Blackcurrant River*, 2020) was just the latest in a number of such pieces which have lent a notable emphasis on compositions for brass to her catalogue. 'I've had a flurry of brass commissions for some reason! As soon as I understood the vocal characteristics of the different brass instruments, together with their extraordinary capacity for homogeneity, I found that it became much easier to compose for brass as a medium.'

This rather invites the question as to what the brass quintet is or what its specific qualities are. Comparisons may be subjective, but for Gregson, these lie wholly outside the brass domain. 'I'd make the comparison with writing for string quartet as opposed to brass band or even orchestral brass. Because you only have the four instruments it encourages linear invention instead of, or in addition to, the harmonic. So, in the case of Bartók and Shostakovich, their contrapuntal mastery is greater in their quartets than it is in any of their works in other genres. In the case of the brass quintet, the same is true – more so, as with strings you can at least have multilayered chords by using double- or triple-stopping across all four instruments, but with brass all you have are five-part

Onyx Brass (David Gordon-Shute, tuba; Amos Miller, trombone; Alan Thomas, trumpet; Andrew Sutton, horn; Niall Keatley, trumpet) with composer Bobbie-Jane Gardner

chords, maximum. Both my brass quintets feature a sizeable contrapuntal element, which encourages you to be more inventive to the extent that every note counts!'

The means by which Perinpanayagam worked towards her commission involved no less technique, but they were conditioned by unfortunate and, sadly, not exceptional circumstances, in which she experienced racism. 'The sequence of events that led to the existence of my piece was entirely unplanned, as at time of writing I was shuttling between complete emotional freeze and devastating moments of awareness. Struggling to be creative and with the Onyx deadline looming, I knew I had to write something so I could get the creative part of me moving again – even if clumsily. I think that the decision to transcribe my erratic breathing was a very literal and desperate version of "write what you know". I wasn't thinking about any potential future for the material, it was a time when I existed only in the present tense. I wrote most of the piece in a matter of days, but finding a truthful ending while living in that repetitive state was harder. The ending I finally landed on came from a hope there might eventually be a little light at the end of the tunnel.'

Should this subjective response in the context of writing for brass quintet be at all surprising? After all, composers have long given vent to their innermost thoughts in the context of music for orchestra or even string quartet, so why not here too. And, despite its outward demeanour, Gardner's piece is no less personal or emotionally involving in terms of what it is conveying. The composer explains: 'At the time of writing this piece, during the pandemic, there were some personal challenges. Midway through, I realised it was a mini-catharsis of this experience, and although on an initial hearing *Up on the Toes* may sound light-hearted, in its creation I realised I was processing something sad that was happening to people I cared about deeply. It's not important that the audience listens for that. At the end of the day, the piece is an off-kilter, lopsided dance that draws playfully on messy, though in reality quite normal, human relations – a laugh or cry moment, if you like.'

The piece by Hall (the first of two included here) is afforded emotional context by being the musical 'translation' of a late poem by Arthur Rimbaud, who soon gave up creative writing altogether to become a trader and all but disown his brief yet trailblazing career as a poet. '*Blackcurrant River* is about a stream which rolls through strange valleys. As with much of my music, the piece meanders within quite a static realm only to find itself, and what it really wanted to say all along, at the end. It's more a reflection of the poem than its embodiment.'

When even this cross-section of the pieces included on the album confirms the potential diversity of writing for brass quintet, where does it leave the medium in terms of what this Onyx album might represent? As its prime instigator, Miller is keen for listeners themselves to judge. 'The hope would be that it makes clear firstly that the brass quintet is a flexible, sonorous and deeply expressive medium for real chamber music; secondly, that there are compositional challenges when writing for a small group of players on instruments where the sheer physicality of execution and stamina effects some amazing inventiveness among composers with the talent of those featured here; and thirdly (and this is something that we're still fighting to prove, even after all these years), that a brass

ensemble doesn't have to resort to cheesy gimmicks in order to survive.'

Even such a seasoned composer for brass as Gregson waited for 16 years before writing anything further for brass quintet and has not since returned (whether by intention or by design) to this medium. 'The opportunity didn't arise until John Wallace commissioned a work for his ensemble Equale Brass. *Equale Dances* is more inventive in its exploitation of timbres, the trumpeters playing piccolo trumpets and flugelhorns in specific movements. I should add that I made a conscious decision around 1977 not to write for brass for a while as I felt in real danger of becoming typecast. In any case, I feel that two brass quintets are enough for any composer!'

'An ensemble driven first and foremost by unity of breath remains a very powerful thing' – Yshani Perinpanayagam, composer

For Perinpanayagam, the opportunity to write further for the medium would be welcome, not least because the comparison between brass instruments and the human voice is a potent one. 'The fact that I sank instinctively into this medium as my expressive outlet when I did feels obvious in hindsight and was a wonderful language match to have found moving forward. I would love to return to this medium, but next time much more consciously. The sheer range of sounds possible with these five instruments offers a sonic playground for everything from hyperactive new worlds to intimate half-thoughts. An ensemble driven first and foremost by unity of breath remains a very powerful thing and I'd love to wire myself up to it again.'

Gardner feels no less enthusiastic about revisiting this medium in the light of her experience. 'I really enjoyed writing for Onyx, who have a lovely relaxed and helpful energy. It would be great to write for the medium again knowing what I do now, but I'd go easier on the French horn and tuba! I'd make it funkier and jazzier though – as my tutor Geoff Hannan often mentioned, sometimes the music will lead you in a different direction if you listen carefully enough.'

Hall, too, would relish the challenge of writing for brass quintet afresh, while also admitting: 'I have absolutely no idea how I'd tackle this, as I take each piece very much as it comes!'

There seems little doubt, even so, that this release has fulfilled its remit as regards the actual musicians. Not least for Miller, who, 30 years on, regards commissioning as more crucial than ever to the survival of live music-making, given the opportunities it provides to (re)interpret the past from the vantage of the present while continually looking towards the future. Indeed, there could hardly have been a more appropriate way to mark this ensemble's 30th birthday. 'We wanted to celebrate it with a volume of new works,' says Miller. 'We still feel that our survival depends on that, and the most rewarding aspect of all the hundreds of concerts we've done is that we almost always include at least one contemporary piece. It's vitally important – and not merely in terms of new music – that listeners have permission not to feel they must be experts before they can enjoy something, and that nothing should prevent them from loving music or from having their own opinions. Whatever else it achieves, this disc hopefully sums up our idealistic spirit as well as showcasing those sonorities which brought us all together as one-time members of the National Youth Orchestra – X-NYO being an anagram of ONYX!' G

Onyx Brass's new NMC album will be reviewed in our August issue

GRAMOPHONE CLASSICAL MUSIC AWARDS 2023

Orchestra of the Year

This is not a quest for the 'greatest orchestra in the world' – the list would probably not change very much from year to year, anyway – but rather a way of celebrating that intensely creative magic that occurs when one outstanding musician stands in front of dozens of others. It's hard to explain, but when it happens there's no hiding the excitement, the power and the ability to affect an audience profoundly. And happily, it happens frequently!

We've created Apple Music playlists for each orchestra, focusing on recent recordings with a few back-catalogue items, as well as a regularly updated playlist featuring all 10. So, before you simply vote for the local band, have a listen and enjoy the extraordinary alchemical results of an orchestra giving its all. And then vote for the ensemble you think worthy of succeeding last year's Budapest Festival Orchestra as *Gramophone*'s Orchestra of the Year 2023. **James Jolly**

Gramophone's 2022 Orchestra of the Year, the Budapest Festival Orchestra, a magnfiicent ensemble associated since 1983 with its Music Director Iván Fischer

BBC Philharmonic (UK)

One of the jewels in the BBC's crown, the Manchester-based Philharmonic, now in the care of John Storgårds, has a long pedigree of making superb records for Chandos. (As a radio orchestra, the studio is its main habitat and it clearly relishes the set-up.) We've long come to expect playing of passion and character, often in repertoire that each chief conductor (notably Yan Pascal Tortelier, Gianandrea Noseda or Juanjo Mena) has introduced. Reviewing Storgårds's very fine recent Shostakovich coupling, Edward Seckerson summed it up as 'another terrific release from this source'. And Rumon Gamba's Malcolm Arnold album (4/23) was 'an altogether outstanding release'.

Shostakovich Symphonies Nos 12 & 15 John Storgårds (Chandos, 4/23)

Berliner Philharmoniker (Germany)

For magnificent musicianship from top to bottom, ensemble-playing that speaks of a long-cultivated heritage and a chief conductor who really know how to rehearse and then let the magic happen in concert, the mighty Berliner Philharmoniker have few competitors. Shostakovich symphonies from Kirill Petrenko in May were very fine ('Petrenko and the Berlin Philharmonic have few rivals for dynamic streamlined brilliance,' wrote ES), but – rather more off the beaten path (though they gave the work's premiere in 1913) – Ruud Langgaard's First Symphony finds inspired interpreters in the Berliners under Sakari Oramo's commited advocacy, bringing virtuosity and genuine character to music of a far from familiar idiom.

Langgaard Symphony No 1 Sakari Oramo (Dacapo, 1./23)

Chicago Symphony Orchestra (USA)

As Riccardo Muti's 13-year tenure as Music Director draws to a close, the great Chicago orchestra – whose recorded legacy is as long as it is broad (think of the treasures from Fritz Reiner, Sir Georg Solti and Daniel Barenboim) – is sounding terrific. Its vaunted brass balanced by string playing of enormous cultivation and lyricism, its winds as eloquent as ever. Muti's repertore in Chicago has taken some surprising turns and this month's release of music by three living composers shines a new light of the great Italian maestro's autumnal years on the podium.

Glass. Montgomery. Raimi Riccardo Muti (CSO Resound, 7/23)

Le Concert des Nations (Spain)

Rather like Nikolaus Harnomncourt and Frans Brüggen, Jordi Savall stepped up from soloist (he remains a magnificent viol-player) to being an inspired conductor – and with an ever-expanding repertoire. At home in Baroque and Classical music, he's forging forward into the 19th century with performances of impressive ambition and poise. Of their Schubert *Unfinished* and *Great* C major coupling, David Threasher commented how 'the ensemble remains solid even in the motoric, stamina-sapping string figures that propel the finale of the Ninth,' resulting is what may now be 'the ideal choice'. This impressive period ensemble, largely employing musicians from Mediterranean and South American countries, has tremendous personality and a unique spirit.

Schubert Symphonies Nos 8 & 9 Jordi Savall (Alia Vox, 11/22)

Danish National Symphony Orchestra (Denmark)

Under its clearly inspirational Italian chief, Fabio Luisi, the Danish National Symphony Orchestra – which is fast approaching its centenary in 2025 – has made an impressive debut on DG with a cycle of Carl Nielsen's symphonies (soon to be supplemented by the three concertos). Bringing a completely idiomatic approach to the composer, the playing of the Danish orchetra is, in ES's words 'personal to the point of posessiveness. This orchestra lives its heritage'. An impressive partnership, Italian warmth meeting Nordic cool, that is well worth watching.

Nielsen Symphonies Fabio Luisi (DG, 3/23)

Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen (Germany)

Founded in 1980, this magnificent chamber orchestra (which can be expanded to embrace the demands of larger repertoire) has been in the artistic care of Paavo Järvi since 2004, so what better time than to celebrate its excellence, and a palpably inspiring musical partnership, as they approach their 20th anniversary. With Haydn symphonies under Järvi (which 'brim with life') demonstrating the vibrant creativity of this long relationship, Beethoven and Stravinsky violin concertos with Vilde Frang ('attentive to every small detail'), and Weinberg under Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla, this orchestra's range is remarkably broad and its ability to deliver makes it one of Germany's finest – and thankfully they're wonderfully well represented on record.

Haydn Symphonies Nos 101 & 103 Paavo Järvi (RCA Red Seal, 6/23)

Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra (Finland)

In the UK we're used to Finnish conductors dominating our orchestral life (with great results!), but now the tables have been turned and Nicholas Collon, of Aurora Orchestra fame, is the first British conductor to head a Finnish orchestra. And what an auspicious start they've made together – and the recordings come thick and fast. Music by Gražyna Bacewicz takes an Editor's Choice this month, one of Thomas Adès had Andrew Mellor suggesting 'it shows up the class of the FRSO' and an album of Lotta Wennäkoski's music was an ear-opener, not only for the music but for the superb orchestral playing. And these terrific recordings perfectly demonstrate the breadth and questing nature of this fine ensemble's approach to repertoire and genuinely inspired programming.

Bacewicz Concertos etc Peter Jablonski; Elisabeth Brauss; Nicholas Collon (Ondine, 7/23)

London Philharmonic Orchestra (UK)

After a deeply impressive period (2006-21) with Vladimir Jurowski as Principal Conductor, which had the orchestra playing with astounding power and conviction (witness the glorious Stravinsky album that came out last September, ES noting 'the LPO's most articulate playing') they are now in the care of Edward Gardner. Again, magnificent ensemble and characterful solo work are to the fore – prime characteristics of the new partnership's gloriously daring, and fantastically executed, first recording together, Michael Tippett's *The Midsummer Marriage*. With its annual immersion in opera, as the house ensemble at Glyndebourne, reaping rich dividends, this is a recording that demonstrates what a superb ensemble the LPO is in a city not exactly short of magnificent symphony orchestras.

Tippett The Midsummer Marriage Edward Gardner (LPO,, A/22)

Orchestre de Paris (France)

Last year, Klaus Mäkelä's Norwegian ensemble featured among our ten nominees (prompted by their impressive Sibelius symphony cycle). This year it's his French group, the Orchestre de Paris. Go to any of their concerts at the acoustically ravishing Philharmonie de Paris and you'll be amazed at the warmth of the Parisian audience towards their Finnish maestro. And the orchestra clearly adore him too, because they play with real passion, and buckets of character too. This year saw their first Decca release together, Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* and *The Firebird* ballet, music towards which the Paris players feel a direct ownership ('Just gorgeous playing throughout,' wrote ES). Another impressive partnership worth celebrating.

Stravinsky The Rite of Spring. Firebird Klaus Mäkelä (Decca, 5/23)

National Symphony Orchestra (USA)

If the orchestra of the USA's capital has lagged in recognition behind the old-established Big Five of America (Chicago, Cleveland, New York, Philadelphia and Pittsburgh) or the newer wave of superb West Coast ensembles like Los Angeles and San Francisco orchestras, things may be changing. Led by Gianandrea Noseda, well known for his work at the BBC Philharmonic and Turin Opera, and as a dynamic guest with the LSO, the National SO of Washington is sounding very fine, the ensemble tighter and more punchy, the winds showing real character. These qualities are well demonstrated by the first releases in a series focusing of the music of the African-American George Walker (1922-2018), undeniably thorny, but music that responds excitingly to the kind of committed advocacy that Noseda and his orchestra bring. But if you want to sample them on more familiar ground, there's a Beethoven symphony cycle in the offing – and we know how exciting Noseda can be in that music.

Walker Sinfonia No 4 Gianandrea Noseda (NSO, 1/23)

Listen to the recordings in our Apple Music playlists at gramophone.co.uk/awards and cast your vote by September 7

GRAMOPHONE
RECORDING OF THE MONTH

Edward Breen admires a superbly cast and characterful account of Handel's opera Serse from The English Concert and conductor Harry Bicket

Handel

Serse

Emily D'Angelo *mez* ..... Serse
Lucy Crowe *sop* ..... Romilda
Paula Murrihy *mez* ..... Arsamene
Daniela Mack *mez* ..... Amastre
Mary Bevan *sop* ..... Atalanta
William Dazeley *bar* ..... Elviro
Neal Davies *bass-bar* ..... Ariodate
The English Concert / Harry Bicket *hpd*
Linn (CKD709 ③ • 173')
Includes libretto and translation

This animated and engaging recording, captured with clarity, might perhaps finally please the Fourth Earl of Shaftesbury, who bemoaned the indifferent performances of the original cast back in May 1738. Despite that commercial failure (only five performances), I would agree with David Kimbell's judgement that '*Serse* is at least the equal of the finest Royal Academy operas of the mid-1720s' – and certainly one of the most melodious. Part of its modern attraction lies in its proto-*buffa* elements, thanks largely to the libretto's Venetian origins, later adapted by Silvio Stampiglia (1664-1725) and once set to music by Giovanni Bononcini. There are comic moments – often driven by the two Venetian stock figures – that are hard to capture on a sound recording but which this pleasingly delineated cast keep clear and light, as their quick-fire recitative allows many emotions to sparkle between the famous arias.

The superb cast is led by Emily D'Angelo in the title-role, whose opening aria will not disappoint: beautifully controlled and rich in tone, it's an entrance aria like no other – a powerful king singing about the beauty of a tree. Bicket's tempo may not wallow but D'Angelo certainly basks in the long melodic lines, leaving hints of despotic tendencies for the long journey ahead. This opera inspired some of Handel's most ingenious musical architecture and his gentle but persistent disruption of formal conventions throughout aids both comedic flow and character development. The first sign of this is Romilda's entrance, which, heralded by muted strings and recorders, mocks Serse's tree-hugging antics. Her song is interrupted by onlookers, however, and by the time she reaches a dazzling cabaletta Serse has fallen for her. Lucy Crowe plays this scene superbly well, from her radiant first entry to her audacious and fearless ornamentation in 'Và godendo vezzoso e bello'.

'The superb cast is led by Emily D'Angelo, whose opening aria – beautifully controlled and rich in tone – will not disappoint'

Harry Bicket leads a crack team of Handelians

Serse, unaware that his brother Arsamene (Paula Murrihy) is already Romilda's lover, decides to declare his passion directly to Romilda himself ('Io le dirò che l'amo'), an aria sung by D'Angelo with such uncomplicated arrogance that the comedy is momentarily suspended. Indeed, her vocal presence throughout this recording is gloriously commanding, but her character journey is equally impressive. She is admirably complemented by Murrihy, whose portrayal of the slighted brother is poignant when Arsemene copies Serse's tune, sure that his beloved Romilda will not take the king's passion seriously. Murrihy leaves just enough room for a glimpse of doubt in her character's facade. It's a delicious anticipation of the drama to come.

A fine cast of singers is supported by The English Concert in a superb performance of Handel's Serse

PHOTOGRAPHY: TOMMY GA-KEN WONG

Scheming and flirtation are left to Romilda's sister, Atalanta, who has her own eyes on Arsamene. Mary Bevan sparkles here, and she closes Act 1 with one of Handel's most modern arias, 'Un cenno leggiadretto', in which she lists the many coquettish ways she could flirt, accompanied by ravishing violin flutters. It's more of an acted song than a set-piece aria and Bevan is captivating. Listen out also for her short but powerful flash of defiance in the Act 3 aria 'No, no, se tu mi sprezzi', in which she dialogues with Handel's mocking *unisono* strings.

There is a strong character performance from William Dazeley as the comic servant Elviro, whose flower-selling scene in Act 2 is a highlight. Similarly, Daniela Mack as Serse's rejected lover Amastre grabs the limelight with her Act 2 aria 'Or che siete, speranze', in which she portrays the awakening of deep anger. Attention is repeatedly pulled back to Serse's character development, and although D'Angelo doesn't quite lose control enough in 'Se bramate d'amar' (Act 2) for my liking, when Serse is finally outwitted in the penultimate scene by learning that his brother has secretly married Romilda, a crisis point is finally reached and he explodes into a classic rage aria, 'Crude furie degl'orridi abissi', which shows the full range of D'Angelo's skill; the effect is more astonishing for her not having played all her cards until this point.

A special mention must be made of the orchestra and their silvery string tone. The Overture is full of sprightly anticipation and notable for its harpsichord energy, and the Act 3 Sinfonia is broad and rich. Speaking of the harpsichord, that very particular restlessness peaks in Arsemene's suffering aria 'Amor, tiranno Amor', where the final flourish squirms with unresolved longing.

On choosing their recording of *La Resurrezione* (6/22) for last year's Critics' Choice (12/22), Mark Seow referred to Bicket and The English Concert as a 'crack team of Handelians'. I couldn't agree more: this new *Serse* is surely one of the most charismatic recordings now available. Ⓖ

KEY TO SYMBOLS

②	Compact disc (number of discs in set)
SACD	SACD (Super Audio CD)
DVD	DVD Video
Blu-ray	Blu-ray
LP	LP
	Download/ streaming only
Ⓡ	Reissue
Ⓗ	Historic
T	Text(s) included
t	translation(s) included
s	subtitles included
nla	no longer available
aas	all available separately
oas	only available separately

Editor's Choice
Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings reviewed in this issue

Orchestral

Arnold Whittall explores new orchestral works by Emily Howard:

'However grandly cosmic the thinking, the end results are intensely human as well as deeply satisfying' ▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 45

Guy Rickards welcomes colourful film music by Vaughan Williams:

'Yates secures splendid playing from the BBC Concert Orchestra in a big-boned, symphonic score' ▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 50

Bacewicz

Piano Concerto[a]. Concerto for Two Pianos and Orchestra[b]. Music for Strings, Trumpets and Percussion. Overture

[ab]Peter Jablonski, [b]Elisabeth Brauss *pfs* **Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra / Nicholas Collon**

Ondine (ODE1427-2 • 62')

Grażyna Bacewicz: all those harsh consonants, suggestive of jagged edges and perhaps a certain defiant wilfulness – qualities shared by her music. The connection is fanciful, but no more so than the one the composer herself drew between having been a premature baby and the 'engine' of her mature personality (one of a number of fascinating insights from Anastasia Belina's first-rate booklet notes).

Bacewicz's music certainly thrives on its high metabolic rate, its impatience, even, for which this brilliantly executed new album makes no apology. The relatively early Overture, composed in Nazi-occupied Poland, already highlights this temperamental default, and not only because Nicholas Collon and his orchestra take it at such a cracking pace. The Piano Concerto of 1949 elevates convulsive contrast almost to a principle, with big neo-Romantic gestures (shades of the Rachmaninov of the *Paganini* Rhapsody) cheek-by-jowl with luminous Martinů-like sequences, Polish folk-song paraphrases (semi-compulsory under the post-war Stalinist socialist realist aegis), and a percussive drive that suggests, to me, above all Honegger. Switch on to this restless mindset and it's not hard to relish Peter Jablonski's dashing account; resist it, however, and the suspicion of short-windedness persists.

Seventeen years on, the Concerto for two pianos is a shade or two more atonal: more forbidding in the slow movement, more abrasive in the finale, as though consciously taking into account something of the moderated avant-gardism of Bacewicz's Polish contemporaries (which would be hardly surprising, given that she was co-founder of the Warsaw Autumn Festival). Bartók is the evident jumping-off point, as he is even more overtly in the *Music for Strings, Trumpets and Percussion*. Here at least, though, the music seems a little more concerned with continuity. A couple of Sibelian evocations suggest the depths Bacewicz might have been able to plumb had she been able to curb her instincts for nervily hopping from one idea to the next.

At the very least this music deserves recognition for its effortless disregard of the neoclassical/modernist/humanist divide. Jablonski is a seasoned Bacewicz crusader, with a fine solo album of her music to his name (3/22). Elisabeth Brauss, Nicholas Collon and the Finnish RSO match him for energy and aplomb. Altogether this is a disc as thought-provoking as it is engaging. **David Fanning**

CPE, JS & WF Bach

'More Bach!'

CPE Bach Sinfonia, Wq182/3 H659 **JS Bach** Brandenburg Concertos – No 3, BWV1048; No 5, BWV1050 **WF Bach** Sinfonia, 'Dissonant', Fk67

Elbipolis Baroque Orchestra, Hamburg / Jürgen Gross *vn*

Challenge Classics (CC72960 • 54')

Presenting Bach's music alongside that of his sons does not always make for comfortable programming, but here it's particularly satisfying. That's partly because Friedemann and Philipp Emanuel are represented by two particularly fine pieces, the latter by one of the famous set of symphonies commissioned by Baron van Swieten, the former by a comparatively early work that sits somewhere between his brother's and father's: the double minuet by way of a fourth movement recalls the First *Brandenburg Concerto* but is closer in style to Telemann. As so often, Friedemann is the harder nut to crack, but one soon gets past the surface eccentricity: at his best he's a match for his younger sibling, and so it is here. (Incidentally, the first two movements of Emanuel's Symphony are meant to follow one another continuously but when streaming it there is an awkward gap between them: it's something for companies to ponder; and I detect a rogue pizzicato just before the end of the first part of the third movement of the Friedemann, which ought to have been edited out.)

All this has been recorded before, but the *Brandenburgs* are a special case. These zestful performances are led (by Jürgen Gross) rather than conducted. Just occasionally this results in a hint of uncertainty as regards tempo (try the opening phrase of Concerto No 5, for example); a flexible rhythmic approach is perfectly valid but needs perfect unanimity to be convincing. But I particularly enjoyed harpsichordist Olga Chumikova's 'cadenza within a cadenza' in the same movement: the slight stutter before the final drive to the cadence feels deliberate, and very nicely judged. The rest of that concerto sounds very well. The sound image is a touch bass-heavy to my ear (in the first movement of *Brandenburg* No 3 the down-beats tend to thump), but it is good to hear the violas so clearly. In any case, a programme like this one stands or falls on its premise, for there are countless *Brandenburg* sets out there; and on that score this counts as a success. **Fabrice Fitch**

Beethoven

Five Piano Concertos[a]. Die Geschöpfe des Prometheus, Op 43 – Overture

[a]Garrick Ohlsson *pf* **Grand Teton Music Festival Orchestra / Sir Donald Runnicles**

Reference Recordings (FR751 ③ SACD • 3h 6')

In his booklet note to the five Beethoven piano concertos, recorded over the

Generosity of phrase and tone: violinist Kerson Leong gives a songful account of Bruch's First Concerto and a powerful reading of the Britten – see review overleaf

PHOTOGRAPHY: MARCO BORGGREVE

course of a week during July 2022 in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, Garrick Ohlsson writes: 'Sixty years ago I learned my first Beethoven concerto and forty-four years ago I finally performed the last of the five.' He goes on to say that he has performed each of them well over a hundred times. Donald Runnicles adds that whenever he and Ohlsson collaborate, time is never spent in conversation beforehand about tempos, phrasing or other details. They simply begin making music together and thus, in an exercise of intuitive symbiosis, arrive at their joint interpretation. The result, as heard here, is a spacious, unrushed account of these canonic works, forthright and yet deeply personal.

Of all pianists before the public today, Ohlsson's technique is among the most honest. Every note is present and accounted for, nothing ever fudged, all within an exquisitely calculated proportionality. His approach is, above all, lyrical. In fact, listening to the slow movements of these concertos, one would be hard-pressed to name another performance that sings with greater contour, poise and clarity. Harsh or ugly sounds are simply nowhere to be heard, though Ohlsson's dynamic palette is varied and immense. Trills fairly sparkle and passagework, however exciting, never obtrudes on the critical element of the sonata principle: thematic characterisation and development. That Ohlsson is one of the least exhibitionistic of musicians is evident in the cadenzas, which emerge organically from the fabric of the music and seem perfectly integrated into the narrative context. Meanwhile, the concluding rondos seem ready to burst with a sense of elation and sheer fun.

In the C minor Third Concerto, a sense of ebullience outweighs the tragic. The *Emperor* (No 5) is a resplendent play of light and colour, its *Adagio* a stroll through Elysian fields, with the finale an exercise in kinaesthetic delight. My favourite of this set, however, is the Fourth. Here soloist and conductor outdo themselves in the execution of Beethoven's subtlest expression. Orchestral balances are exquisite, drama abounds, the finale is fairly rollicking and Ohlsson plumbs the depths of the *Andante con moto* with the utmost simplicity. This is a bouquet of Beethoven concertos like no other. **Patrick Rucker**

Beethoven · Ravel

Beethoven Piano Concerto No 2, Op 19[a]
Ravel Piano Concerto in G[b]
Martha Argerich *pf*
Israel Philharmonic Orchestra / Lahav Shani

Avanti (AVA10662 • 52')
Recorded live at the Charles Bronfman Auditorium, Tel Aviv, December [a]22 & [b]24-27, 2019

According to one online discography, there are 11 recordings of Martha Argerich playing Beethoven's Second Piano Concerto and 15 of the Ravel G major. Does the world really need another?

When the pianism is as playful, youthful and inventive as this, how could anyone doubt it? Argerich, it seems, is constitutionally incapable of playing a string of equal notes simply as they appear on the stave; each run is inflected somehow, given a personalised articulation or dynamic, stretched or telescoped to create something utterly singular and individual, yet without in any way distorting the music. Her touch is just as magical in these performances, made at the age of 78, as it is in recordings dating back five decades or more. There's no sense of routine, of a veteran pianist wheeling out the party pieces one more time. It would take ages to go through them all to make certain, but you're left feeling fairly sure

that even in the pieces with which she's been most closely associated for years, she's never played them the same way twice.

Argerich has always been a cheerleader for Beethoven's B flat Concerto and it sounds as fresh here as ever. Her touch is assertive in the opening movement, richly reflective in the second. And she launches into the finale before the *Adagio*'s final note has died away, daring the Israel Phil players to keep up with her, which they just about do.

It's the same in the Ravel. Listen carefully and you may spot a missed note or two – but it barely matters. This is joyous music-making from first note to last. Although Argerich has performed with the Israeli orchestra for many years, this is the first collaboration with them she has sanctioned for release, and in Lahav Shani she finds a like mind – any momentary uncouthness from the orchestra is purely a matter of these being live performances, as is some barely perceptible audience noise. There's a breathless whoop and enthusiastic applause at the end of the Ravel. Argerich's undiminished brilliance is a reason to rejoice – and long may she continue! Even if you already have her playing 11 other Beethoven Seconds and 15 other Ravel G majors, do give these wonderful, unique performances a listen.

David Threasher

Brahms · Schumann

'Brahms by Arrangement, Vol 2'

Brahms Symphony in F minor (after the Sonata for Two Pianos, Op 34*b*). Variations on a Theme of Schumann, Op 23 **Schumann** Six Canonic Studies, Op 56 (all orch Holloway)

BBC Symphony Orchestra / Paul Mann

Toccata Classics (TOCC0450 • 85')

Brahms's Op 34 already exists in more than one form: most famously as the turbulent Piano Quintet but also as a starker, bleaker Sonata for two pianos. In addition, it was initially conceived as a string quintet – and was reverse-engineered back to that form by Anssi Karttunen on the first volume of Toccata's 'Brahms by Arrangement' (10/12). Nevertheless, as Robin Holloway reminds us, despite its persistent chamber dimensions the work is 'potentially symphonic, in size, scope, ambition, depth of feeling and breadth of technique'.

Holloway's orchestral realisation of Op 34 (specifically the two-piano version) has been around for a while but this is its first recording, deriving from BBC Maida Vale sessions that were broadcast earlier this year. Holloway doesn't limit himself to Brahms's resources or techniques – he adds a cor anglais and a contrabassoon, and writes for multiply divided strings and chromatic brass – but that's perhaps necessary to deal with Brahms's dense and knotty 20-fingered writing. Some of the instrumentation seems instinctive, such as the distribution between oboe and clarinet of the lyrical melody at 0'54" in the first movement; some is delightfully counter-intuitive, such as the muted brass in the development at 8'20".

One suspects that the necessarily rehearse-record nature of the project has led to the occasional sense of the music's propulsion being held in check; the Scherzo especially feels frustratingly reined-in at times when compared with, for example, Martha Argerich going at it hell-for-leather in any one of at least three official recordings of the sonata. The finale, though, is notably successful, Holloway's response to the ambiguity of its shifting moods leading to a performance of impressive drive and confidence.

The other works are Holloway's orchestrations of Brahms's piano-duet variations on Schumann's 'last musical idea' (the theme of the *Geistervariationen*), its sound world coming close to the *St Antoni* Variations and even (in the minor-key Var 4) the First Symphony; and Schumann's own *Canonic Studies*, behind whose prosaic title lies a sextet of miniatures of winning charm. Occasional untucked corners in the performances lead one to hope that these works – especially the sonata-symphony – will be granted the opportunity to mature in the concert hall. One prays, too, that Toccata (or anyone) will champion more of Holloway's music, not least the Symphony commissioned for the Proms in 2000 – premiered then but shamefully never once revived. His 80th birthday later this year could be the ideal opportunity.

David Threasher

Britten · Bruch

Britten Violin Concerto, Op 15 **Bruch** Violin Concerto No 1, Op 26. In memoriam, Op 65

Kerson Leong *vn*

Philharmonia Orchestra / Patrick Hahn

Alpha (ALPHA946 • 73')

Kerson Leong's splendid account of the Bruch comes hot on the heels of Randall Goosby's no less committed reading with Yannick Nézet-Séguin and the Philadelphia Orchestra. But there are notable differences in tone which might loosely be summed up by saying that Leong's take on the piece is more outgoing in expression.

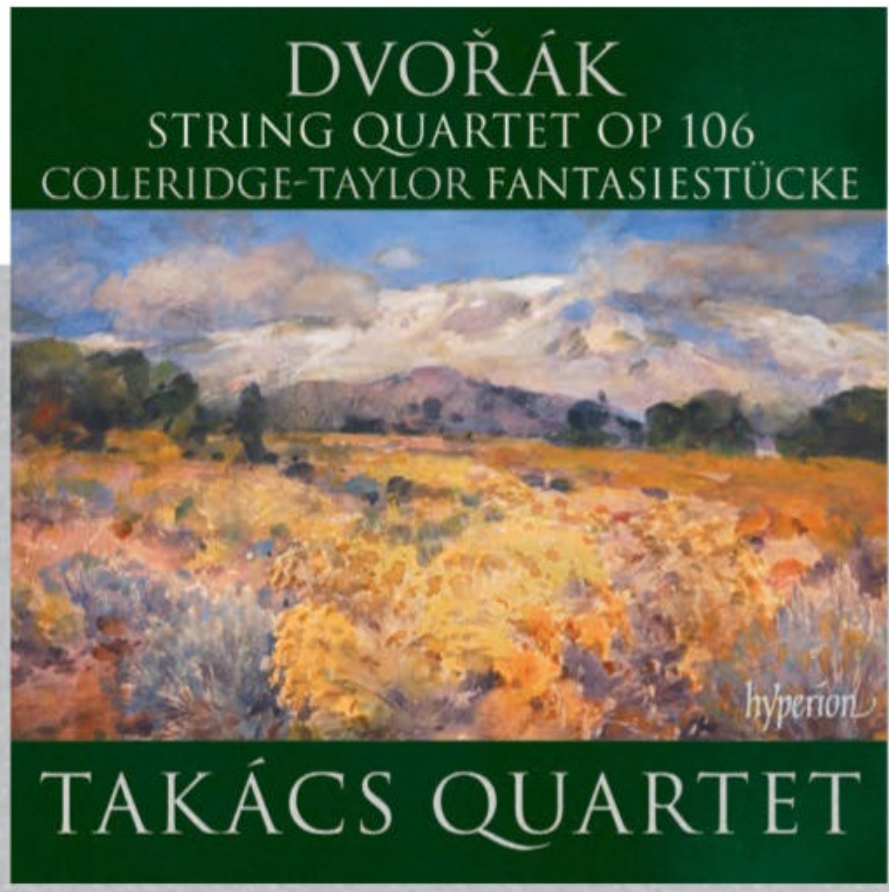
Leong's generosity of phrase and tone, for instance, comes unashamedly from the chest in the songful reaches of the slow movement, and in the finale where the big tune bears down on the G string he really tugs at our emotions. Goosby is perhaps more restrained, more patrician, for such a young man. Both are special. Both make something affectingly inward of the closing pages of the slow movement, putting to rest thoughts of a certain *Alpine Symphony* whose summit unapologetically borrows Bruch's noble theme and projects it majestically large.

The bonus addition here is Bruch's little-heard but substantial tribute to Joseph Joachim, *In memoriam*, which is as turbulent as it is reflective, as befitting the legendary violinist's fighting spirit, and gives Leong further opportunity to sing from the heart. My thoughts occasionally turned to Elgar and the more than a hint of *nobilmente* that it proffers.

But it is the coupling of the Britten Violin Concerto (gratifyingly becoming more and more core repertoire these days) which, like Goosby's Florence Price, sets this disc apart. The inspiration here was another violinist, Antonio Brosa, but more self-evidently, through the Spanish inflections in its material, it's a meditation on that most divisive of civil wars – something which clearly distressed and exercised Britten, the pacifist. This is the composer at his most elegiac and unsettled (is it major or minor?) and Leong is clearly at one with its inner tussles – but also with all the extraordinary sparks of originality which make it unmistakably Britten: like the powerful coda of the first movement which pits the soloist's abrasive pizzicato against deeply meditative strings only to have him grow more and more prayerful with the music's ascendancy.

The kinship with Shostakovich is startling in the trenchant Scherzo, which Leong digs into with great resilience, but again the entry of the tuba with violin and piccolo *in extremis* high above the stave is pure Britten, as is the emotive orchestral climax.

But Leong really makes his mark with the concluding Passacaglia, a form so beloved of both Britten and Shostakovich as a metaphorical anchor in times of great stress. Suddenly psychological ambiguities are set aside and in the wake of one war Britten



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Dvořák's mature string quartets are masterly, all brimful of life-enhancing music, and Op 106—richly embued with the warmth and humanity so typical of its composer—is no exception. The Takács Quartet gives superlative accounts of both this and the apt coupling by a young Samuel Coleridge-Taylor.

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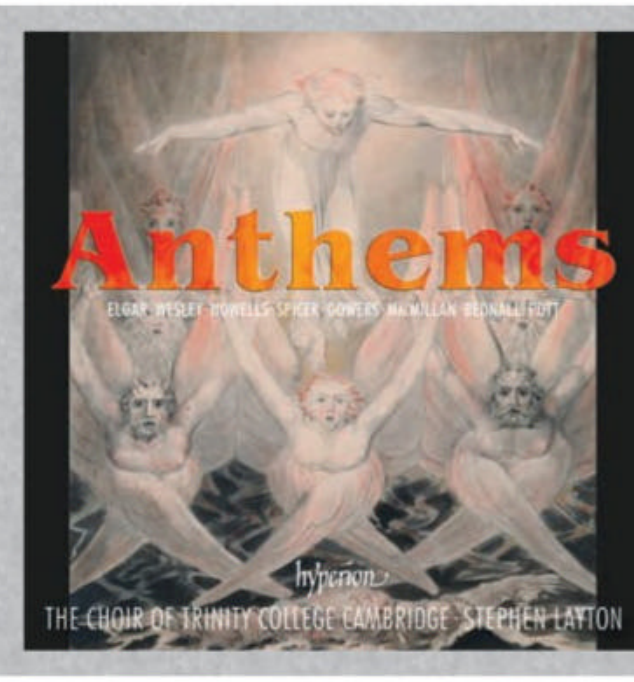

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becomes contentious objector of all. The tragedy catches in his throat and the music of those closing pages – movingly projected by Leong – chokes on the soloist's final utterances.

With outstanding collaboration from Patrick Hahn and the Philharmonia Orchestra I can't recall a better account of the piece than this. **Edward Seckerson**

Bruch – selected comparison:
Goosby, Philadelphia Orch, Nézet-Séguin
Decca 485 4234 (6/23)

Farrenc

Symphonies – No 1, Op 32[a]; No 2, Op 35; No 3, Op 36[a]. Overtures – Op 23; Op 24
Insula Orchestra / Laurence Equilbey
Erato (5419 75221-0 ② • 114')
[a]From 9029 66985-2 (10/21)

If you haven't heard Louise Farrenc's music, you might doubt the fervent claims made about it. Can her recently revived First and Third symphonies really 'stand comparison with virtually any [others from the] mid-19th-century', as Richard Wigmore insisted when Laurence Equilbey's recording, an Editor's Choice, first showed up a couple of years ago? In fact, those works deserve the accolades – as do the earlier, more robustly orchestrated overtures and the lithe Second Symphony that Equilbey includes on her follow-up. This is vital music of bracing energy and absorbing melodic character that circumvents well-beaten paths.

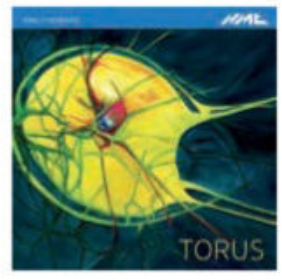
I don't mean that Farrenc embraces the kind of radical innovations that Berlioz (who admired her work) exploited; shock is rarely in her arsenal. But while RW is correct that she 'never meanders' (at least in the sense that she never forsakes the music's through-line), she never does exactly what you expect, either. Kaleidoscopic orchestration (treatment of woodwinds is especially inventive), unpredictable phrase-lengths (for instance, in the seven-bar introduction that abruptly drops us into the Second's finale), formal and rhythmic swerves (the third movement is full of disarming surprises) and a propensity to recast her musical ideas where a lesser composer would simply repeat them: all of this ingeniously plays off against the Classical structures that serve as her base. The result is a striking combination of caprice and rigour that lifts the music out of the ordinary.

The power and ingenuity of Farrenc's orchestral output is so great that even mid-level performances, like those of Christoph König (Naxos, 6/17, 1/20), make a strong impression. Still, the intricacy of her writing – for instance, the conversational back-and-forth among the instruments – blossoms when it's set out by a first-rate ensemble such as the Insula Orchestra. The sophisticated contrapuntal weave of the Second Symphony's finale, for example, certainly has more focus here than it does under König, not to mention Johannes Goritzki (CPO). Those earlier recordings made the case for Farrenc; Equilbey and her period-instrument players clinch it.

It's hard, though, not to register frustration at Erato's marketing. Those who prefer physical media, and who purchased the first instalment of this series, can apparently only buy the second in a two-disc set that duplicates their initial purchase. Not a decision that benefits the listener – or the composer. **Peter J Rabinowitz**

E Howard

Antisphere[a]. Compass[b]. sphere[c]. Torus[d]
[b]Julian Warburton *perc* **[c]BBC National Orchestra of Wales / Mark Wigglesworth; [a]BBC Philharmonic Orchestra / Vimbayi Kaziboni; [d]BBC Symphony Orchestra / Martyn Brabbins; [b]Birmingham Contemporary Music Group / Gabriella Teychenné**
NMC (NMCD274 • 69')
Recorded live at [c]Snape Maltings, June 23, 2018; [d]Barbican, London, November 1, 2019; [a]The Bridgewater Hall, Manchester, October 29, 2022



Torus (2016), *sphere* (2017) and *Antisphere* (2019) are three examples of what Emily Howard calls 'orchestral geometries', titles that embody her concern with shapes and spaces suggesting musical structures and compositional processes. So far, so abstract: an attitude to art distancing itself from psychology and poetics. Nevertheless, feelings cannot be completely suppressed. The players are invited to respond to textures the composer describes as 'visceral' or 'skeletal', as well as to play the music 'lucidly'. There is nothing pallidly recondite here. The music deals with processes that countless other composers have explored, including the possibility of moving between scientific materialism and more mysterious states of mind. It's a world that might lead you to expect affinities with Varèse, Xenakis, Scelsi – even the Russian maverick Galina Ustvolskaya.

The culminating panel of the triptych, *Antisphere*, was premiered by Simon Rattle and the LSO; this performance is viewable on the internet and provides an ideal introduction to the imaginative interplay between metal percussion and other orchestral groups that Howard deploys to suggest sonic analogies to the character of objects in space – frozen in sustained stability at one extreme, fracturing into brightly coloured shards at the other. Yet, despite *Torus*'s subtitle of 'Concerto for Orchestra', there is no indulgence in mere display. Intensity is preferred to elaboration, but listeners are given the space to recognise the similarities of mood and material encountered during the course of each work, as well as the differences. On this album, all three orchestras, all three conductors and all three recordings fit well with the overriding need for lucidity as well as resolution – there's a sense of confidence that the means are always precisely suited to the expressive ends.

Compass (2022), the fourth piece on the disc, is the most recent. Its scoring for a solo percussionist and string septet brings it closer to chamber music, so it is perhaps appropriate that a spirit of subjective unease comes across from time to time, countering the range of more decisive expressive states that predominate. There is an almost raw quality to both the string sound and the reverberating clangour of percussion in this premiere performance by the Birmingham Contemporary Music Group, making it clear that however grandly cosmic the thinking from which these compositions start out, the end results are intensely human as well as deeply satisfying. **Arnold Whittall**

Ketèlbey

A Birthday Greeting. The Fanciful Etchings. From a Japanese Screen. In a Camp of the Ancient Britons. In a Fairy Realm. In Holiday Mood. A Japanese Carnival (Basque). A Mayfair Cinderella. Mind the Slide!: A Musical Joke. My Lady Brocade. Silver Cloud: An Indian Maiden's Song. Wildhawk: A Descriptive Indian Romance
BBC Concert Orchestra / Martin Yates
Dutton Epoch (CDLX7407 • 82')

Few English composers have been the subject of such consistent condescension as Birmingham-born Albert W Ketèlbey. You won't catch a Rattle or Elder sullying their CVs with such lowbrow effusions – and certainly not

the (now all-inclusive) BBC Proms, which has included precisely two works by Ketèlbey in its entire history: *The Throne* in 1907 and *In a Monastery Garden* in 2009. This new album of his music makes you wonder why he has been so marginalised by the musical establishment of his native land, because several pieces here, were they ascribed to, say, Grieg, a composer whose *Lyric Pieces* and incidental theatre music are very much in the same idiom, would ensure they were played more widely and accepted for what they are: endearing, colourfully orchestrated examples of English light music. As 'Peppering' wrote in these pages back in July 1928, welcoming a new album of eight 12-inch Columbia discs conducted by the composer: 'In Mr Ketèlbey's world of successful make-believe there is room for everyone except the musical pedants and snobs.'

All three movements of *In Holiday Mood* (1938), which opens proceedings, might easily be mistaken for Eric Coates. This is the suite's first digital recording, as is also the case for nine other titles. *My Lady Brocade* is a premiere recording while *From a Japanese Screen* and *A Birthday Greeting* have not been heard complete before in their original orchestrations. For these, we must thank the indefatigable champion of so much forgotten, overlooked British music, conductor Martin Yates, and Tom McCanna, who not only supplied the scores but has written the excellent booklet (which includes Ketèlbey's own notes on his music).

The BBC Concert Orchestra have this idiom in their blood. I can't think of another outfit that 'gets it' quite as well and so convincingly, whether in the exuberant opening 'On the Promenade', the Debussy-esque 'A Passing Storm-Cloud on a Summer Day' (from *Three Fanciful Etchings*), *A Mayfair Cinderella* (instantly conjuring a vision of some 1930s costume romance starring Greer Garson or Ronald Colman), the high-spirited *A Japanese Carnival* (1927, great fun) and *Mind the Slide!* (Ketèlbey's humorous 1915 excursion into ragtime). Everything is done with such irresistible and stylish panache that even when Ketèlbey's inspiration flags (as it does in maybe a handful of the 18 tracks) Yates covers up the cracks, as it were, and maintains one's interest.

Several titles have not seen the light of day on disc since Ketèlbey himself recorded them in the 1920s. The acoustic ones I've always found very difficult to listen to – not here, in this beautifully recorded resurrection.

Jeremy Nicholas

Glass · Montgomery · Raimi

'Contemporary American Composers'

Glass Symphony No 11[a] **Montgomery** Hymn for Everyone[a] **Raimi** Three Lisel Mueller Settings[b]

[b]**Elizabeth DeShong** *mez*

Chicago Symphony Orchestra / Riccardo Muti

CSO Resound (CSOR9012301 • 66')

Recorded live at Orchestra Hall, Chicago, [b]2018, [a]2022

Riccardo Muti's tenure with the CSO came to an end in June this year with three performances of Beethoven's *Missa solemnis*, just shy of 50 years after the Italian first conducted the orchestra in July 1973.

Philip Glass's association with the orchestra extends even further, albeit in a more indirect way. A recipient of the University of Chicago's accelerated college programme, the precocious 15-year-old student attended several CSO concerts during the early 1950s, hearing Fritz Reiner in Bartók, Mahler and Bruckner.

The influence of Bruckner in particular is heard in the large-scale architectural sweep of Glass's three-movement Symphony No 11 (2017). The first movement begins and ends with pulsing G minor chords in low brass and woodwinds heard against uncertain five-beat ostinato patterns in harp, piano and strings. A sense of suppressed energy is maintained throughout the lyrical second movement, while the symphony's metric complexity is further ratcheted up in a powerful polyrhythmic finale that surges towards a dramatic three-note, fate-like climax on repeating B flats.

Muti and the CSO take a more measured approach than do Dennis Russell Davies and the Bruckner Orchester Linz. Muti makes less of the tempo changes in each movement, which enables him to better integrate the work's block-like design. A neater balance is provided between the orchestra as a whole and the cameo roles for piccolo, E flat and contrabass clarinet, harp and a large percussion section. The military-style opening to the final movement is especially effective.

The album also features Max Raimi's *Three Lisel Mueller Settings*, each song cleverly pairing Elizabeth DeShong's deep mezzo-soprano respectively with solo clarinet, bassoon and double bass, and Jessie Montgomery's promising *Hymn for Everyone*. Montgomery's neatly constructed single-movement work opens with a hopeful rising and falling five-note melody, which hovers around the fifth of the scale before resting on a turn-like figure. The work culminates in an effective Coplandesque, fanfare-like ending.

Muti's legacy with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra will most likely be remembered for his interpretations of more classical repertoire; but this album stands as testimony to the Italian master's innate musical understanding and ability to bring out the best in almost everything he conducts. **Pwyll ap Siôn**

Glass – comparative version:

Bruckner Orch, Linz, DR Davies

Orange Mountain Music OMM0133

Lim

Annunciation Triptych

Emily Hindrichs *sop*

WDR Symphony Orchestra / Cristian Măcelaru

Kairos (0022003KAI • 44' • T)

If Liza Lim isn't on your musical radar, I suggest you remedy that. I can't think of many other composers today who, on a grand scale, combine her mastery of colour and form with sensitive engagement to where we're at ecologically. Following a monograph on her music by Tim Rutherford-Johnson (Wildbird Music: 2022), Lim returns on Kairos with *Annunciation Triptych* (2019-22), an orchestral cycle celebrating three female spiritual leaders: Sappho, Mary and Fatima (the latter the daughter of the prophet Muhammad). It focuses, Lim says, on how revelation and ritual connect different spiritual traditions. Alongside this, it explores the natural environment and the classical orchestral tradition.

In *Sappho/Bioluminescence*, Lim analogises the radiant power of Sappho's poetry with the way in which some creatures (fireflies, deep-sea fish) create light in their body. About a third of the way through – following an opening riot of sound featuring overplucked harp, microtonal winds, and strings cascading like a shoal of fish – the titular announcement arrives in a striking spectralist chord built on burnished brass tones. The brass's major triads set a foundation over which percussive patterns scatter to and fro. There is a Messiaenesque languorous eroticism to this music, apt for Sappho's love poetry, and the WDR Sinfonieorchester Köln's performance is superbly controlled, lush but sharply defined.

The second work, *Mary/Transcendence after Trauma*, opens with a lyrical minor-key string texture. We are in the Virgin

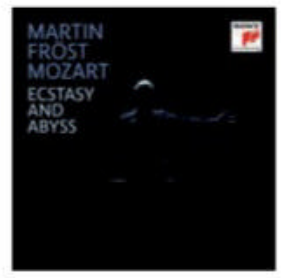
Clinching the case for Louise Farrenc: Laurence Equilbey completes a period-instrument survey of her compatriot's symphonies – see review on page 45

PHOTOGRAPHY: JULIEN BENHAMOU

Mary's place as, terrified, she receives the angel Gabriel, signalled by bass drum strikes against silence, setting off piano string harmonics. A piano solo suggests Mary's delirium at this terrifying visitation. A while later, the strings play what sounds like a quotation of the opening of the *Lohengrin* Prelude, signalling the 19th-century conversation Lim's triptych strikes up. The closing work, *Fatimah/Jubilation of Flowers*, opens with an elegiac trombone solo playing a motif based on ascending and descending perfect fourths. After a couple of minutes, the soprano Emily Hindrichs enters, singing expressively the regal trombone motif with lyrics from poetry by Etel Adnan. Are these three works symphonic poems of sorts? Decide for yourself. **Liam Cagney**

Mozart

'Ecstasy and Abyss'
Ch'io mi scordi di te, K505[a]. Clarinet Concerto, K622[b]. La clemenza di Tito – Parto, ma tu, ben mio[c]. Piano Concerto No 25, K503[d]. Symphonies – No 38, 'Prague', K504; No 41, 'Jupiter', K551
[a]**Elin Rombo** *sop* [c]**Ann Hallenberg** *mez* [ad]**Lucas Debargue** *pf* **Swedish Chamber Orchestra / Martin Fröst** [bc]*basset cl*
Sony Classical (19658 77225-2 ② • 139')



'You gotta get a gimmick', Louise is advised in *Gypsy*. In opera-directing circles, it's sometimes disparagingly called a *Konzept*. The *Konzept* for Martin Fröst's double album of Mozart, titled 'Ecstasy and Abyss', is a flimsy one. The idea is that two cities – Leipzig and Prague – feature at key moments in Mozart's life: Leipzig in May 1789, when the impecunious composer gave a concert there, well received by the critics but still making a financial loss; Prague in 1791, where his opera *La clemenza di Tito* premiered to great acclaim and where he conceived his miraculous Clarinet Concerto for his friend Anton Stadler. From 'abyss' to 'ecstasy'. At least Sony didn't call it a 'project' (DG's new buzzword).

Gimmick aside, this is an enjoyable double album of Mozart. It's also a significant release in two respects. It marks Fröst's recorded debut as a conductor (rather than as soloist-director), with the Swedish Chamber Orchestra. And it also marks his third recording of Mozart's Clarinet Concerto, performed on a basset clarinet, as indeed were his two previous recordings, with the Amsterdam Sinfonietta (2002) and The Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen (2010). Why a third? As Fröst notes in the booklet, there are different versions of Edvard Munch's *The Scream*, existing 'in plural, across time and physical forms, as an idea, an ever-changing idea'. He adds: 'And there is no single, definitive Mozart Clarinet Concerto.' The cynic may add that his two previous recordings were for BIS and Fröst has since jumped labels to Sony.

Fröst certainly exercises the freedom that having two recordings of the concerto safely 'in the can' permits him. He's always been willing to ornament Mozart's phrases and does so with abandon here, notably in the third-movement Rondo, which chortles along merrily. There are no real cadenzas in the concerto, just a couple of moments where Mozart writes a fermata that invites a decorative phrase or two. There are two such in the first movement, the second of which Fröst greets in slightly hyperactive fashion (10'45"). The cadenza opportunity in the *Adagio* (3'33") is given

an extended fantasy-like treatment lasting around 40 seconds.

Fröst's tone is as ripe and gorgeous as ever. His tempos are largely the same as before and he draws responsive playing from his orchestra. Do you need this Fröst recording? Mega-fans will lap it up. Others may want to consider the couplings – his Amsterdam recording pairs it with Mozart's exquisite Clarinet Quintet, whereas the Bremen disc has the *Kegelstatt* Trio.

Under Fröst, the Swedish Chamber Orchestra's style in Mozart echoes another SCO – the Scottish Chamber Orchestra under Charles Mackerras; namely, modern instruments playing in a historically informed manner (antiphonal violins) with the addition of incisive period brass and timpani. There is pleasing aggression to the two symphonies – the *Jupiter* and the *Prague* – and some lively tempos, recorded in an acoustic that allows for plenty of instrumental detail to shine through.

The two discs are uneven. The 'Leipzig' one opens with an account of the *Jupiter* Symphony where the inner movements are problematic. In the *Andante cantabile*, the first violins' opening phrase is met with an ugly, accented jab in the string and woodwind response, startling on first hearing and not in a good way. One is on edge every time the chord returns. The Menuetto is nice and swift but the Trio section has odd phrasing and emphases, with held notes and awkward pauses. The outer movements are strong and the finale bustles along in high spirits, although Fröst does not observe the second repeat.

Elin Rombo is mellifluous in the concert aria *Ch'io mi scordi di te*, with neat piano contributions from Lucas Debargue, who is the slightly prissy soloist in the C major Piano Concerto, K503. It would be good to hear more fun in his playing.

The 'Prague' disc, which closes with the Clarinet Concerto, also contains Sesto's aria 'Parto, ma tu, ben mio' from *Clemenza*, ravishingly sung by classy Swedish mezzo Ann Hallenberg, with Fröst providing the obbligato basset clarinet support, and – naturally enough – the *Prague* Symphony. This fares much better than the *Jupiter*, with lively, assertive playing, the *Allegro* of the first movement fizzing along (no second-half repeat). The middle movement feels swifter than the *Andante* tempo marking but maintains a *cantabile* singing line, while the finale races at an even faster lick than Mackerras in Scotland.

I'll not relinquish that Linn set of the last four symphonies, but the playing on the 'Prague' disc here is pretty fine. We all know and love Fröst the clarinettist, but Fröst the conductor is clearly someone with interesting ideas. **Mark Pullinger**

Clarinet Concerto – selected comparisons:
Fröst, Amsterdam Sinfonietta *BIS BIS-SACD1263 (A/03)*
Fröst, Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen *BIS BIS1893 (12/13)*

Symphonies – selected comparison:
SCO, Mackerras *Linn CKD308 (4/08)*

Neri

Giani Liebster Jesu[a] **Neri** Sonate da sonarsi con varij stromenti – Sonatas from Opp 1 & 2. Ad charismata caelorum[a]. Salve virgo benignissima[a]

[a]Voces Suaves; Concerto Scirocco / Giulia Genini

Arcana (A544 • 76' • T/t)

Massimiliano Neri cuts an interesting figure among the ranks of 16th-century Venetian composers. He was born around 1620 to a Veronese father whose pro-imperialist leanings had led him to work in the courts of Munich, Neuburg and Düsseldorf. The family arrived in Venice when Massimiliano was about seven. When his father returned to Germany, Massimiliano stayed behind and rose to become organist at St Mark's. But in 1651 the post turned sour when he published his second collection of works and travelled to Vienna seeking the emperor's patronage for them. This got him informed on to Venice's state inquisitors, so when in 1664 he got wind of the death of the Kapellmeister in Bonn, where his uncle lived, he sneakily obtained leave of absence from the Venetian chapel, travelled to Germany, got the post and never returned – but died a couple of years later. Not a bad yarn, is it?

As for the musical soundtrack to this politically choppy life, not much has survived intact, and some reconstruction has been necessary. Yet Concerto Scirocco's selection paints a fascinatingly diverse picture, with instrumental works ranging from small groups to polychoral ensembles, plus three motets for which the ensemble is joined by Voces Suaves. What leaps out as you listen is how little this sounds like an archetypal Venetian 'early music' programme. The textures, timbres and rhetoric are too complex, developed and diverse, whether it's small-forces sonatas looking ahead to the 18th-century trio sonata or larger groupings heading towards the concerto grosso. Listen for instance to the *Canzon seconda* a 4 (from Op 1), where the soloistic feel of its violin-writing and its overall contrapuntal, rhetorical complexity sound a lot like a Venetian-flavoured version of what Corelli would be up to in Rome in a few decades' time. And it's not even all Italian-sounding. Take the motet *Liebster Jesu* – written in fact by Neri's Florentine soprano wife, Caterina Giani, and here sung by Christina Boner with gorgeously cool, light, crisp purity – which sounds quite Schütz-y.

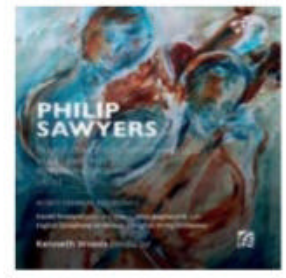
The two 12-voice sonatas come with a brilliant mix of festive pomp and twinkle-toed sparkle, the brass notably light and agile. But perhaps the highlight is the *Sonata decima à otto*, juxtaposing choirs of recorders and strings against two theorbos, which under this lot's fingers dances, flirts, sighs, converses and reflects with joyous warmth, the contrasting timbres beautifully balanced. Essentially, Neri has in every way been done proud here. **Charlotte Gardner**

Sawyers

Double Concerto for Violin and Cello[a]. Remembrance for Strings[b]. Octet[c]. Viola Concerto[d]

Daniel Rowland [a]*vn*/[d]*va* **[a]Maja Bogdanović** *vc* **[b]English String Orchestra; [ad]English Symphony Orchestra [c]soloists / Kenneth Woods**

Nimbus Alliance (NI6436 • 71')



The Double Concerto for violin and cello is the second work that Philip Sawyers has composed for the prodigiously gifted Maja Bogdanović (the first being the Cello Concerto of 2010 – 10/14). In the booklet, Sawyers notes that writing in the shadow of Brahms was 'somewhat daunting', but the (seemingly) effortless lyricism and warm Romanticism of his three movements belie this. Here is a vibrant, melodic work, beautifully laid out for the instruments from first bar to last, and Bogdanović and violinist Daniel Rowland perform it with infectious enthusiasm.

The 20th century saw the creation of some magnificent viola concertos: Walton's, Hindemith's, Bartók's and Holmboe's (7/13) among many. Sawyers's is worthy of such company, relatively modest in dimensions but punching well above its weight, from the striding theme of the opening *Allegro* to the breezy *scherzando* finale. Separating them is a contemplative, grave *Andante*. Rowland, here on viola, plays it with total belief, his

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tone exquisite, his understanding with the orchestra absolute.

A memorial for a colleague's mother, *Remembrance* for strings (2020-21) incorporates quotes from Sawyers's tone poem *The Valley of Vision* (1/19) that she had been rather taken with; a nice touch, and Kenneth Woods and the English String Orchestra respond with sensitivity. The Octet (2007) is scored for the same ensemble as Schubert's (in which company it was premiered). It packs much into its 15 minutes: tragedy, pathos, a skittish waltz and some lively Hindemithian counterpoint. It is superbly rendered by eight members of the English Symphony Orchestra. Nimbus lists the players in the booklet, mistakenly assigning principal bassoonist Rosemary Cow to second clarinet! Fortunately, their recording, made at Wyastone in 2021, is a model of clear, warm, precise sound. Strongly recommended. **Guy Rickards**

Skalkottas

Concerto for Violin, Viola and Wind Orchestra[a]. Violin Concerto

George Zacharias *vn* [a]**Alexandros Koustas** *va*
London Philharmonic Orchestra / Martyn Brabbins
BIS (BIS2554 SACD • 58')

Arguably, both recordings here are firsts, as although Skalkottas's Violin Concerto (1937-38) has appeared on CD before, this is the first recording of the new critical edition, correcting 'mistakes, misreadings and [deciding] on the best text' from the various sources, by Dr Eva Mantzourani (author incidentally of the two best studies in English on the composer). The most noticeable outward difference with BIS's previous recording is the timing of the concerto's opening *Molto appassionato* and central *Andante spirito*, significantly shorter in this new version, by 1'30" and 4' respectively. Brabbins's firm, no-nonsense tempos provide a tauter framework for Zacharias and keep the central span moving where Georgios Demertzis and Nikos Christodoulou in Malmö arguably turned the latter into *Adagio spirito* (albeit beautifully achieved). Curiously, Brabbins is markedly slower at the outset of the *Allegro vivo vivacissimo* finale, though the *Prestissimo* conclusion thrills exactly as it should.

For many, however, the main novelty will be the Concerto for violin, viola and large wind ensemble (1939-40), given its first recording here by Zacharias (using his own edition) with viola player Alexandros Koustas. As in the Violin Concerto, Skalkottas here deployed his personal 12-note method, but it is Hindemith that one is reminded of throughout. Not often cited as an influence on him, Skalkottas must have encountered the German's music when studying in Berlin and this double concerto is audibly a musical grandchild of the 1920s *Kammermusiken*. Skalkottas's scoring – needing far more players than the 10 required in his Third Piano Concerto (BIS, 3/05; Paladino, 5/20) – is miraculously clear, but required Brabbins and the London Philharmonic's woodwinds and brass to be on top form; they are and never overwhelm the soloists. I found Zacharias wobbly in intonation in a couple of points in the solo concerto but not in the later work. BIS's sound is superb.

Guy Rickards

Violin Concerto – comparative version: Demertzis, Malmö SO, Christodoulou
BIS BIS-CD904 (6/98)

Vaughan Williams

49th Parallel – complete film music

Jessica Millson *sngr*
BBC Concert Orchestra / Martin Yates
Dutton Epoch (CDLX7405 SACD • 81')

Vaughan Williams came late to film composing. By 1940, when he started on his first such score, for *49th Parallel*, Bliss, Britten and Walton had already enjoyed notable success, and in the darkening days of that first full year of the Second War, Vaughan Williams – with *The Pilgrim's Progress* and related works (the Fifth Symphony not least) already under way – needed a project as his contribution to the war effort. His pupil Muir Mathieson arranged for him to score Powell and Pressburger's tale of a U-boat landing party adrift in Canada, and the mayhem they leave in their wake. Vaughan Williams responded with music full of high endeavour, colour and diversity – the U-boat, icebergs, an Eskimo trading post, Hutterite commune, Amerindian festival and more – and the psychological conflicts of the characters, however much some may appear as caricatures to our 21st-century sensibilities.

In preparing his performing edition, Martin Yates found that a substantial amount of Vaughan Williams's music was either unused in the final film (much of which has no accompanying music at all), heavily cut or – as with the German text of the *Volkslied* sung by the Hutterite girl, Anna, or the parts for a pair of saxophones used throughout the score – omitted from the soundtrack. Yates has restored these so that they can be heard for the first time, a significant editorial decision rendering comparisons with other recordings of this music redundant; for example, with Stephen Hogger's suite recorded by Rumon Gamba (Chandos, 11/04).

This is a major release. Yates secures splendid playing from the BBC Concert Orchestra in what proves a big-boned, symphonic score – the uncut 'Prologue panorama' runs to nearly 16 minutes – bookended by the title sequence with its glorious tune (adapted in 1943 as the hymn *The New Commonwealth*). Dutton's recording is beautifully balanced, not perhaps as richly warm as Chandos's but clear and more than rich enough.

Guy Rickards

Weill

Symphonies – No 1, 'Berliner'; No 2, 'Fantaisie symphonique'. Der Silbersee – excs[a]

Swedish Chamber Orchestra / HK Gruber [a]*voice*
BIS (BIS2579 SACD • 59' • T/t)

Who was it, again, who said that all music was either fundamentally symphonic or fundamentally balletic? In any case, there can be few 20th-century works that square that circle quite as effectively as Kurt Weill's 1934-vintage Second Symphony, and the tension between the theatrical and the symphonic is the (very effective) mainspring of this disc from HK Gruber and the Swedish Chamber Orchestra. We expect a certain theatricality when Gruber's name is attached to anything, and these wide-eyed performances do not disappoint.

So if you're a fan of 'Nali' Gruber's inimitable vocal stylings, fear not; the opening selection from *Der Silbersee* finds him (after a rhythmically charged Overture) in utterly characteristic voice. Whether that nasal accent is more Vienna than Berlin is for more seasoned German-speakers to say, but Gruber's relish is unmistakable: rolling his Rs, occasionally snarling but somehow still managing to drape a phrase and project a long, lyrical line in a way that's disarmingly seductive. He pulls off a similar feat with

Wide-eyed performances, complete with vocal stylings: HK Gruber leads personal and highly theatrical accounts of Kurt Weill's two symphonies and Der Silbersee

the symphonies. Gruber apparently sees the cortège central movement of the Second Symphony as a sombre tango, but throughout both of these works – the sprawling post-expressionist fantasy of the First (1921), as well as the more neoclassical Second – he characterises themes and rhythms with a wink and a sly kick (listen to the wry march that emerges after 3'00" in the Second Symphony's finale), coupled to an energetic sense of forward momentum. This is music-making that really does feel like it's telling a story, enhanced by the lucid, precision-tooled virtuosity of the Stockholm players and Gruber's ability to pace and place forceful climaxes, as well as Weill's oases of overcast lyricism. It shouldn't work, but it really does. **Richard Bratby**

'An Englishman Abroad'

'Nicola Matteis the Younger and the English Style in 18th Century Europe' **Brescianello** Chaconne in A. Ouverture-Suite in C **Caldara/Matteis** La verità nell'inganno – Ouverture; L'ultimo balletto **Matteis** Violin Concerto in B flat **Purcell** Chacony, Z730 **Telemann** Ouverture-Suite, TWV 55:g5 **Vivaldi** Violin Concerto, 'Il favorito', Op 11 No 2 RV277 **La Serenissima / Adrian Chandler** *vn*
Signum (SIGCD751 • 88')

Who is this Englishman? Well, it's Nicola Matteis – not the Italian violinist-composer we usually hear but rather his son Nicola, who was born in England and travelled to Vienna in 1700, there to become leader of Emperor Charles VI's orchestra. Adrian Chandler has chosen him to spearhead this hunt for English influence on European orchestral music in the first part of the 18th century.

It may sound a tough task, but Chandler knows a lot of Baroque corners and has an ear for the merest hint of Englishness, plus an eagle eye for mineable historical connections. Matteis himself is represented by a 'violin concerto', although there are really only solos in the first movement, and even they don't start until halfway through. In the remaining movements, however, a Purcellian strain lurks under the surface – the hornpipe-like Air could fit nicely into *Dido and Aeneas* – and the same ineffable air is breathed in the quirky ballet movements Matteis wrote for a Caldara opera. I wonder if the Viennese were aware of it.

Some of the composers here could have met Matteis, while others knew people who did. Hence the typically well-made suite by Telemann (he knew Johann Mattheson, who had mentioned Matteis in a treatise); its overture really does have a Purcellian sound to it, one that we might never have noticed had Chandler not drawn our attention to it. Then there is Vivaldi, who could have met Matteis in Trieste when Charles VI was there in 1728, and in whose lustrous *Il favorito* he might have been the soloist. The connections get rather stretched when we come to Brescianello: he 'might have come across' Matteis apparently, but Chandler has been keenly championing his music in recent years. The C major Suite is pleasant enough without reaching Telemann's level but the one-off Chaconne in A is quite a discovery: well-paced, rich with contrast and performed here with great vigour.

Indeed, the strings of La Serenissima – notably young in personnel here – show evident enthusiasm for Chandler's direction throughout, and respond with precision and clarity. Purcell's *Chacony*, with a distinctive catchy clipped note at the head of every bar, has real zip to it. Listening to this Englishman and his ensemble is always refreshing. **Lindsay Kemp**

PHOTOGRAPHY: HANNA WELANDER

Bruckner's Motets

Andrew Lucas talks to **Andrew Mellor** about the challenges of recording these remarkable works

'Without a full complement of sopranos ready to hurl out and sustain high Cs, a choir preparing to record Bruckner might as well pack up and go home.' So wrote Peter Quantrill in these pages in 2015, reviewing a new recording of a selection of the composer's motets.

The new recording from St Albans Cathedral Choir would have been the only catalogue contender from a UK church choir, had it not been delayed by the pandemic and then pipped to the post by a posthumous release from Stephen Cleobury and his choir of King's College, Cambridge. When recordings are planned well in advance, can rotational choirs like these ever be sure they'll have the firepower among their cohort of children to deliver those high Cs?

Andrew Lucas and the St Albans Cathedral Choir recording Bruckner in their liturgical home

'I had a really fine group of boys before Covid-19,' says Andrew Lucas, Master of the Music at St Albans for a quarter of a century. 'We were cruising, gobbling up notes. So yes, I was a bit anxious. But when we came to record in July last year the choir was in a very good place again. These pieces are a gift in the sense that we can sing them in services throughout the year. *Tota pulchra es* was the only motet we hadn't already done.'

That makes a difference. 'You come across performances of sacred music by big-name choirs and I think you can hear that they may know what the words mean but they don't really mean it themselves,' Lucas says. 'It's different when it's what do you every day; when you know what it's about and what the liturgical context is. We're a liturgical choir and I think it shows.'

Bruckner's motets include multiple divisions of voices, testing tessituras and a purity of texture that can expose basic technical shortcomings. Still, says Lucas, this is the right repertoire for his St Albans choir. 'I didn't go into this lightly, but at the same time it suits us down to the ground. We do a lot of Renaissance polyphony but we're not really that kind of choir. We're more muscular. This acoustic isn't one that allows you to waft and croon. There's a flat roof so you get quite a clear sound and you have to energise the space.'

Bruckner's motets span a period from 1861 – when the composer was assistant organist at the cathedral in Linz – to 1892, the year of the first performance of his Eighth Symphony. All set texts in Latin, the liturgical language of Bruckner's deeply held Catholic faith. They range from the compact apollonian *Locus iste* in four parts to the almost symphonic *Ecce sacerdos magnus* for 8-part choir with three trombones and organ. This comprehensive survey extends to the rarer motets with trombone, *Afferentur regi* and *Inveni David* (the latter for male voices only).

Before we open our scores from respective ends of a Zoom call, we address the issue of pronunciation. 'We stuck with our basically Italianate Latin, which is embedded in the choir's style,' explains Lucas, 'so with a soft "g" on Agnus for example. I'm very aware that some German choirs have different vowel sounds too, a higher "e" sound, but you don't want to make a rod for your own back there.'

Ecce sacerdos magnus, the biggest and first work on the album, demands a conductor reconcile the sound of ensemble with that of the building. 'That final chord on "Deo" [bar 21] is loud and high, with the organ thundering,' says Lucas. 'At the sessions I could hear the sound ricocheting off the back of the nave back to me, with all that sense of space. I was allowing for it, giving the full 4 beats [in bar 22], but I didn't initially feel it was coming across in the recording. So we adjusted the levels. It's important you get a sense of the building we're in.' This motet, Lucas suggests, 'brings out the worst in choirs: they scream away on the loud and high bits and then find it very hard to get the right contrast in the bits in between.'

Os justi is no less grand, if less immediately imposing – its eight-part texture emerging out of four. Here we sense Bruckner's intense study of Palestrina. The fugato that begins at bar 16 requires some fluidity, I suggest. 'Yes, but at the same time it's very expressive, the tongue speaking of judgement. I think it's sublime really. I just love the way it grows; the expanse in it.'

It could be tempting to ham-up the harmonic movement at bars 11-13 (and 53-55). 'I worried more about balancing the low bass parts with the other voices at bar 53,' says Lucas. 'You've got basses on a low F which is always going to be a compromise.' In *Christus factus est*, basses sink to a bottom D while trebles climb to a top A. 'It's demanding of course, and at bar 55 ['nomen'] you're getting to the end of the phrase and therefore the end of breath. You have to keep an eye on the quality of the sound there. In this piece, and in the *Ave Maria*, I have some second trebles covering the high alto parts and actually swap the treble and alto parts over from bar 66 to 71 – just for quality of sound.'

'I didn't go into this lightly, but at the same time this repertoire suits us down to the ground'– Andrew Lucas

Tota pulchra es stands out for its more human, call-and-response structure – a tenor soloist pitted against the ensemble. 'I think the Marian texts brought more high emotion out of the Catholic Bruckner,' observes Lucas, pointing particularly to the tenor's declamation of 'Tu gloria Jerusalem' at bar 17. Undoubtedly, the harmonic surprise at bar 51 can wrong-foot those raised on the purer, Cecilian harmonic movement of *Locus iste*. 'And there's a similar moment at the end of each verse of *Vexilla regis*, where it heads back to E minor via E flat major and C major,' adds Lucas.

Sometimes, an easy-seeming passage can conceal hidden traps. 'Tuning the final cadence of *Locus iste* is always hard because of where it lies – in an awkward place for the older boys particularly,' says Lucas. 'To go from a D to an E and for it to be in the right place and sung softly, at the lower extreme of the voice, that's asking a lot. It's not just whether you've learned the notes, it's how you deal with the moment.'

We talk of some of the tricks of the trade that can be employed when recording (and only when recording). One comes at bar 63 of *Virga Jesse*, where the delicate cadence at 'summis' jumps to the sudden *fortissimo* 'Alleluia' on a low E for trebles. 'That's quite hard to do. So for a recording, you can take some boys off the "summis" so they're fresh for the "Alleluia,"' says Lucas.

What of 'consonant boys' – choristers earmarked to provide closing consonants on the end of a phrase while others don't even attempt it, giving the illusion of better ensemble discipline? 'I wouldn't do that,' says Lucas, 'and I actually think it's self-defeating. I'd like to believe we've got that sort of thing together but I also think we can be too prissy with these things. What would Bruckner have worried about? Would he have had sleepless nights because an "s" wasn't together? I'm not so keen on this rather Oxbridge mentality of everything being so perfect that the baby gets thrown out with the bathwater. You end up with no emotion behind it.' G

▶ Andrew Lucas's recording of Bruckner's Motets is reviewed on page 70

PHOTOGRAPHY: PATCH HARVEY

Chamber

Tim Ashley explores a neglected piano quintet by Frank Martin:
'Neo-Baroque cool with frequent echoes of Bach and a poise worthy of Ravel at his finest' ▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 56

Amy Blier-Carruthers enjoys a recital from Daniel Lozakovich:
'He looks to the past for inspiration but isn't scared to make these works his own'
▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 59

JS Bach · Beethoven · Webern

'Prism V'
JS Bach Die Kunst der Fuge, BWV1080 – Contrapunctus 14. Vor deinen Thron tret ich hiermit, BWV668 **Beethoven** String Quartet No 16, Op 135 **Webern** String Quartet (1905)
Danish String Quartet
ECM New Series (485 8469 • 60')

You need your wits about you and the volume up to catch the head-motif opening Webern's String Quartet of 1905, played by the DSQ and recorded by ECM at the prescribed *ppp*. A descending semitone and rising major third may not look much on paper but the theme has in common with the late music of Bach and Beethoven a strength and simplicity sometimes mistaken for severity. The pause markings over each phrase of the introduction are taken seriously; at 18 minutes, this is almost the longest performance on record (compare the LaSalle Quartet at just over 12 – DG, 11/71).

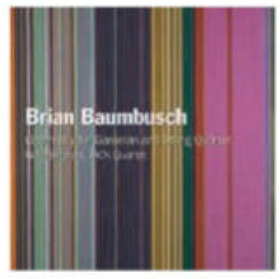
In this regard the DSQ are just surpassed by the Quatuor Diotima (Naïve, 6/16); that neither of these modern accounts hangs heavy is partly due to their broad palette of tone colours, tending in the case of the Danes towards a clean-limbed purity. More than either the Ardittis (Naïve, 12/91) or the Quartetto Italiano (Philips, 7/71, 4/88) – less idiomatically polar in this piece than you'd expect – the DSQ powerfully evoke the historical moment of the piece, poised as it is on the cusp of Webern's incipient hero-worship of Schoenberg and adoption of his 12-note technique.

We might expect the DSQ above others to find an earthy vigour unmistakably prefiguring Nielsen in the cross-rhythms of the Scherzo of Beethoven's Op 135. All the same, the 1826-ity of the quartet is respected in its playful opening exchanges, sounding more or less as though a single generation has passed since Haydn laid down his pen. All the pieces on this final instalment of the 'Prism' series stand on a threshold, and in this Op 135 Beethoven does so with the vitality and humour of the *Diabelli* Variations. The DSQ bring quiet radiance rather than sentimentality to the 'deathbed chorale' commonly appended to *The Art of Fugue*; the incomplete fugue unfolds in spacious legato lines, articulated as a string quartet rather than a keyboard transcription, in tune with the cool, Rothko-esque mood of secular devotion that infuses the series as a whole.

Peter Quantrill

Baumbusch

'Chemistry for Gamelan and String Quartet'
Three Elements for String Quartet[a]. Hydrogen(2)Oxygen[b]. Prisms for Gene Davis[c]
[ab]**Jack Quartet;** [bc]**Nata Swara**
New World (80833-2 • 74')



The sounds of gamelan instruments were first heard in the US at the Chicago Exposition in 1893, and it's close to 100 years since Indonesia's rich musical heritage was introduced to the West through the pioneering research of American ethnomusicologist and composer Colin McPhee and others. Since then, many generations of American composers – from Lou Harrison, John Cage, Barbara Benary and Paul Dresher to Jody Diamond, Michael Tenzer, Wayne Vitale, Evan Ziporyn and others recently associated with the so-called American (or Global) Gamelan movement – have done much to integrate both traditions in various ways.

Born in 1987, California-based composer Brian Baumbusch belongs to a new generation of musicians whose experiences of gamelan music, its sounds and traditions, have largely evolved alongside (and in parallel with) their knowledge and understanding of Western music and culture. This symbiotic relationship has resulted in a far more integrated synthesis between East and West.

Composed for two separate sets of 'American gamelan' instruments designed and built by Baumbusch, *Prisms for Gene Davis* is divided into nine short, uninterrupted movements and culminates in the dizzying multilayered complexity of the final movement. Rich in modal invention, polyrhythmic variety, tempo changes and instrumental layers and contrasts, this impressive work demonstrates the extent to which both traditions have now become indissolubly linked.

The Jack Quartet are in excellent form throughout the *Three Elements for String Quartet* (2016). An exploration of complex polytempo structures and combinations, the first movement's floating, airborne quality is imparted through sweeping open string-like shapes and curves. The second movement contains crunchy harmonic contrasts, while the third movement's fast-paced dynamic and linear motion suggests early Philip Glass.

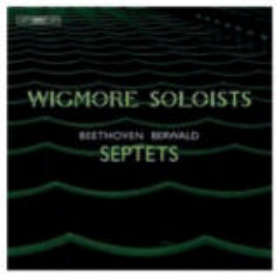
Hydrogen(2)Oxygen combines Baumbusch's own gamelan-inspired set of instruments (created by the composer for his Lightbulb ensemble, founded in 2013), featuring the Balinese performing ensemble Nata Swara and Jack Quartet in an ambitious work that takes its inspiration from Conlon Nancarrow's polytempo techniques. The use of more extended time structures in the first two movements imparts a more meandering narrative quality to the music, while the third movement's more compact and tightly structured design is closer in spirit to *Prisms for Gene Davis*. With a detailed and informative set of booklet notes by Oscar Smith, 'Chemistry for Gamelan and String Quartet' is highly recommended, not only to aficionados of American gamelan music but also to those who are relative newcomers to this exciting and vividly colourful music.

Pwyll ap Siôn

Jeu d'esprit: violinist Isabelle van Keulen and clarinettist Michael Collins lead the Wigmore Soloists in septets by Berwald and Beethoven

Beethoven · Berwald

Beethoven Septet, Op 20 **Berwald** Grand Septet
Wigmore Soloists
BIS (BIS2707 SACD • 61')



The early 19th century couldn't get enough of Beethoven's Septet, to the composer's mounting irritation ('too much sentimentality and too little skill' was his muttered verdict). Its offshoots include, most famously, Schubert's Octet, but also the three-movement Septet of 1828 by the Swede Franz Berwald. There's little here of the quirky individuality of Berwald's symphonies of the 1840s. But his Septet is a welcome *jeu d'esprit*: tuneful, neatly structured (the slow movement enfolds a breezy *Prestissimo* scherzo), and deftly written for the wind-string ensemble.

Berwald could hardly have more persuasive advocates than the Wigmore Soloists, a starry line-up led with mingled finesse and ebullience by violinist Isabelle van Keulen and clarinettist Michael Collins. Aided by typically superb BIS recorded sound, textures are ideally balanced. Touches of horn and bassoon colour always tell. Phrasing of the lyrical melodies – say, the folk-like theme of the *Adagio* – is invariably graceful, while the scherzo interlude and the chattering *buffo* finale are dispatched with scintillating virtuosity and an infectious sense of fun. If the finale doesn't make you smile, you probably haven't been listening.

Beethoven's Septet, as popular now as it was two centuries ago, is just as enjoyable. Compared with other recommendable versions – the Vienna Octet (Decca, 5/88), the Gaudier (Hyperion, 7/92) and the Nash (ASV, 11/04) – the Wigmore Soloists are slightly more urbane. Their Minuet and Scherzo are dapper where the other groups sound more earthy, and more lustily accented. For all van Keulen's refinement and panache, her skittering figuration and chirpy commentaries in the fast movements can be delicate to a fault. But delights abound. No recording I know is so closely attentive to Beethoven's dynamic and articulation markings, not least in the pools of *pianissimo* mystery in the outer movements and *Adagio*. The *Adagio*'s clarinet solo is poetically floated by Collins over feathery strings (bass lines are always kept light and springy); and Alberto Menéndez Escribano makes the soft horn theme that sails in towards the end of the first movement (8'46") as magical as Beethoven surely intended. My inner ear craved added touches of ornamentation in the *Adagio*'s recapitulation – but I suspect that's my problem. The Wigmore Soloists' Beethoven yields to none in polish, buoyancy and *cantabile* eloquence, while the Berwald makes for a thoroughly agreeable *digestif*. **Richard Wigmore**

Beethoven

Violin Sonatas – No 2, Op 12 No 2; No 4, Op 23; No 9, 'Kreutzer', Op 47
Antje Weithaas *vn* **Dénes Várjon** *pf*
AVI-Music (AVI8553512 • 76')

Antje Weithaas and Dénes Várjon highlight the *Kreutzer* Sonata's fantasia-like, improvisatory qualities. Thus, while Isabelle Faust plays the opening four-bar solo as if in a single breath (Harmonia Mundi, 10/10), Weithaas seems to feel her way, savouring the changing colours of each chord. Throughout the sonata, in fact, Weithaas and Várjon do a little pushing and pulling of the tempo for both

expressive and dramatic purposes. Their rubato is generally well considered, although I do wish they didn't signal the unexpected appearance of the second theme by slowing down as they approach (listen starting around 2'35"). This is a subtle thing, I admit, yet the way Faust and Melnikov hold to the tempo provides a magical sense of surprise when the music suddenly relaxes.

Weithaas and Várjon's performance is also one of considerable ferocity. Weithaas attacks the many *sforzando* accents with such vehemence that her tone sometimes spreads a little. The result can feel rough-hewn, but as Beethoven seems to be pushing so forcefully at the boundaries of the genre, a little grit doesn't seem out of place. And in the *Andante con variazioni*, I very much like the way the players save their most delicate and tender playing for the fourth and final variation, giving a sense of a journey inwards towards something quite intimate.

There are some terrific moments in the two earlier sonatas, as well. Weithaas and Várjon give a brilliant edge to the finale of Op 12 No 2 – listen, say, to their whiplash phrasing at 0'25" – and in the second movement of Op 23 they manage to be simultaneously playful and warm-hearted. I'm slightly bothered, however, by the way they overlook some carefully calibrated dynamic contrasts and gradations – the opening of Op 23, for instance, which according to the score is primarily *piano* with stabbing accents. Generally speaking, their *piano* playing could be more confidential. Their fussing with tempo and rhythm can also be a distraction – note the slight hesitations in the passage starting at 3'01" in Op 23's first movement.

This is the first volume in a complete cycle of the 10 violin sonatas, and despite my nitpicking, the adventurous spirit Weithaas and Várjon convey here makes me eager to hear future instalments.

Andrew Farach-Colton

Franck · Martin

Franck Piano Quintet **Martin** Piano Quintet
Martin Klett *pf* **Armida Quartet**
AVI-Music (AVI8553527 • 58')

César Franck's Piano Quintet has notoriously divided opinion since it was first heard in January 1880, when Saint-Saëns, sight-reading his way through the piano part, stalked offstage in disdain the moment the performance was finished. Liszt and later Debussy were also among those to take umbrage at a score that often embraces the grandest and most sensual of passions but which some have also considered torrid or overheated. 'Paroxysm, the whole time', was Debussy's dismissive verdict, much shared, though not, it would seem, by Martin Klett and the Armida Quartet, who offer a considered, reined-in interpretation, albeit one that by no means ignores the emotions at the work's centre.

The tension and restraint characteristic of the performance as a whole are apparent at the outset in the edgy assertion of the opening string phrases and Klett's understated, lyrical response. Despite the complexities and weight of Franck's piano-writing, Klett never allows himself to dominate: the sense of even-handed give and take between the players is consequently paramount and their careful, detailed way with phrasing and dynamics adds immeasurably to the restlessness and gathering passions of the first movement. The central *Lento* is marvellous here, its sadness and nostalgia gradually building towards a climax of almost shocking grief before we reach the finale, where the momentum is relentless, and the closing pages have a fiery exhilaration. The work has been well served on disc, with Clifford Curzon and the Vienna Philharmonic Quartet (Decca, 9/61) and Gabriel Tacchino, grander in drama and gesture, with the Quatuor Athenaeum Enesco (Pierre Verany, 12/92) arguably leading the field. Klett and the Armida may not quite eclipse them but this is a superb achievement that nevertheless runs them close.

What makes the disc so attractive, however, is the choice of Frank Martin's rarely heard Quintet (1919) as companion piece. The two works are in some respects antithetical, and each throws the other into sharp relief. Franck's high Romanticism offsets Martin's neo-Baroque cool, with its frequent echoes of Bach and a poise worthy of Ravel at his finest. Where Franck gives us an intense dialogue for all five players, Martin glides between multiple groupings and combinations of instruments. The piano is often an effective outsider, on occasion commenting, as if from a distance, on what to all intents and purposes sounds like a self-contained quartet, or leading the strings in a witty minuet that never quite seems to go where they – or indeed we – expect. A beguiling work, it's done with wonderful finesse here: the Armida sound exquisite throughout and the limpidity of Klett's playing is simply ravishing. Admirers of the Franck will not be disappointed, but ultimately it's the Martin that makes the disc very special indeed.

Tim Ashley

Franck · Strohl

Franck Cello (Violin) Sonata (arr Delsart)
Strohl Titus et Bérénice
Sandra Lied Haga *vc* **Katya Apekisheva** *pf*
Simax (PSC1377 • 66')

Norwegian cellist Sandra Lied Haga opts for a French programme for her recital with Katya Apekisheva, juxtaposing the familiar Franck/Delsart Sonata with Rita Strohl's *Titus et Bérénice*, something of a rarity and not, I think, entirely successful. Strohl (1865-1941), admired in her day by Saint-Saëns, Duparc and Fauré, was a post-Romantic maverick much drawn to the Symbolist movement, though her 'grande sonate dramatique' takes its cue from Racine's 1670 tragedy *Bérénice*. The idea of a programmatic/narrative sonata is unquestionably novel, though the work itself lacks coherence.

A big opening *Allegro* depicts the Emperor Titus's anguished realisation that he must dismiss his beloved Berenice, Queen of Palestine, while a Chopinesque (and beautiful) *Lento tristamente* suggests her unhappiness at impending separation. The final confrontation is turbulent, more so than the corresponding scene in the play. The problem lies in Strohl's decision to also include a scherzo for Berenice as she is entertained by her ladies in Titus's absence. Pitched somewhere between Mendelssohn and Delibes, it has little to do with Racine and is so stylistically incongruous as to be almost impossible to integrate in performance.

Such, certainly, is the case here, despite superb playing. Lied Haga has a mellow, appealing tone and a scrupulous sense of line, and is more than equal to Strohl's demands for expressive and dynamic subtlety across the cello's entire range. The piano-writing sometimes sounds curiously like a transcription of an orchestral original, with rumbling tremolos suggesting drum rolls and dotted-rhythm fanfares, though Apekisheva, excellent as always, brings plenty of colour and character to it. Interpretatively, she and Lied Haga are relatively reined in and introverted when placed beside their principal rivals, Edgar

Moreau and David Kadouch, loftier in tone and covering a wider emotional range on a two-disc Erato set that also includes the Franck Sonata alongside music by Poulenc and La Tombelle.

Lied Haga and Apekisheva do excellent things with the Franck, meanwhile. Keeping us aware of the evolving structure without turning the work into an exercise in form, they give the music space to expand and breathe. Lied Haga's unforced lyricism is particularly attractive in both the opening *Allegretto* and the slow movement, and she balances sweep and excitement with elegance elsewhere. Apekisheva's technical finesse is apparent throughout, nowhere more so than in the exacting *Allegro*. It's a beautiful performance, if again more understated interpretatively than Moreau and Kadouch. The latter pair make the slightly better case for Strohl. Which Franck you prefer, however, is ultimately a matter of taste.

Tim Ashley

Selected comparison – coupled as above:

Moreau, Kadouch *Erato 9029 57406-2 (3/18)*

Korngold

Three String Quartets

Tippett Quartet

Naxos (8 574428 • 77')

Hans Keller used to talk about 'insiders' of the string quartet: string-playing composers with an instinctive understanding of quartet textures. On that basis, it's safe to say that Korngold – master orchestrator and supremely expressive pianist – was an 'outsider'. With their crunchy, vertical spread chords and teasing written-out rubatos, his string quartets are audibly the work of a pianist: a far cry from the lush, effortlessly lyrical Korngold of the orchestra and opera house. Urgent, edgy and harmonically tangy, they're EWK at his most expressionist, every bit the pupil of Zemlinsky.

That's certainly the impression conveyed by this new cycle from the Tippett Quartet. The recording is up-close and direct; a real chamber acoustic without much scope for string tone to bloom. That suits the performances, which are restless, trenchant and also (or so it feels) very fast. Passages such as the trio section of No 2's second movement and the busier stretches of No 1's outer movements aren't rushed, exactly, but the overall effect is sometimes congested. It all feels rather breathless.

That's a valid approach, of course, and in fairness the Tippetts are adept at pacing the various passages (such as the opening movement of No 3) in which the initial energy ebbs to a troubled calm. The concentrated atmosphere of No 3's film-derived slow movement is wonderfully noir-ish. But I'd have loved a little more playfulness to offset the unstoppable *Schwung* of No 2's waltz-finale, and in the finale of No 1 found myself missing the way the music seemed to open out and bloom on the old Chilingirian Quartet recording (RCA, 10/77, 12/89). The Tippett's Korngold is very much a composer in a hurry, and some will say that's well overdue. They'll find much to enjoy here.

Richard Bratby

Mozart · Widmann

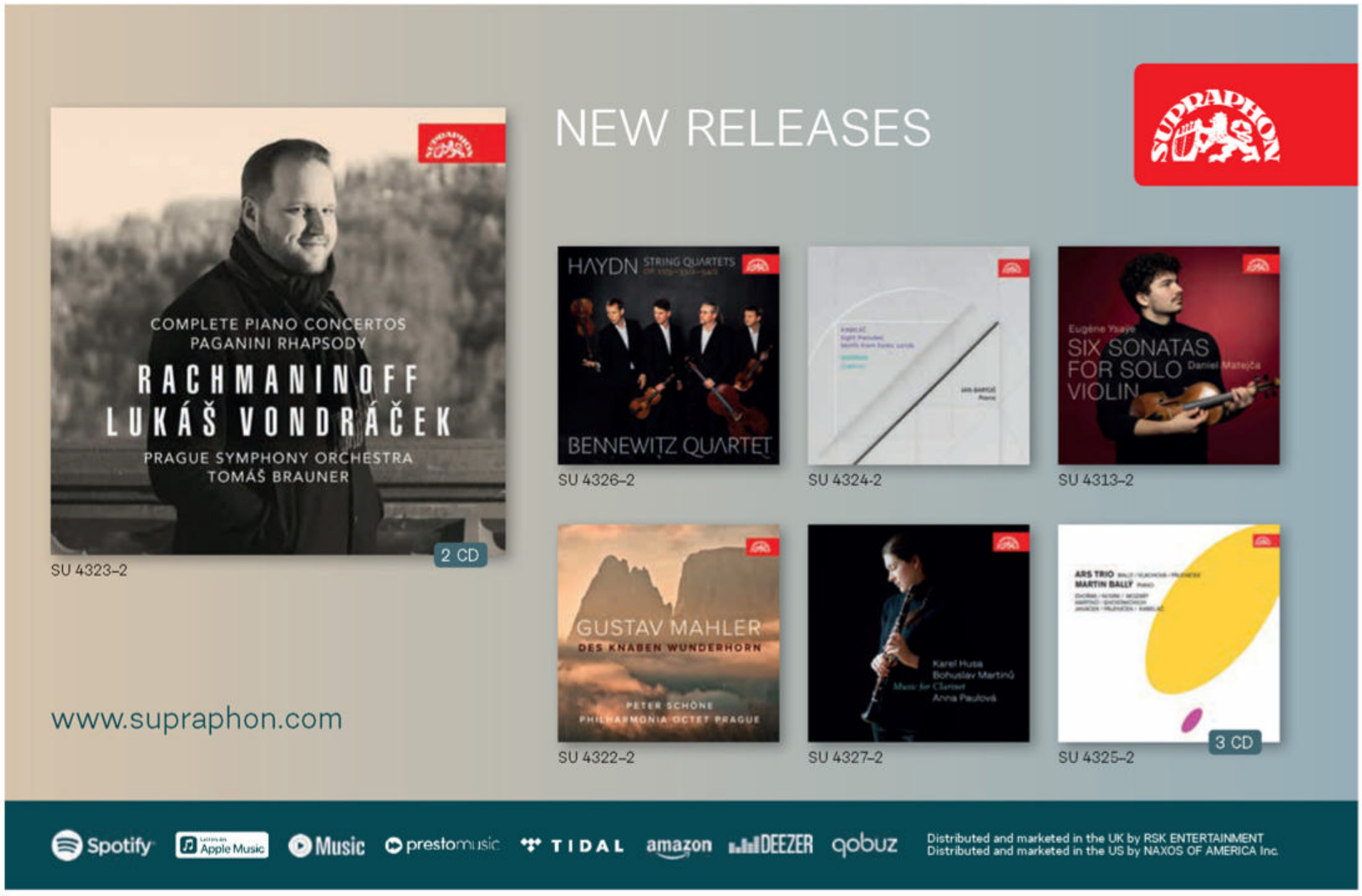
Mozart Clarinet Quintet, K622

Widmann Clarinet Quintet

Jörg Widmann *cl* **Hagen Quartet**

Myrios (MYRO31 • 72')

Jörg Widmann has performed Mozart's Clarinet Quintet with the Hagen Quartet



'countless times', according to the booklet. In 2009 the quartet commissioned him to compose a companion work for the same forces. He wrote 17 bars before giving up, abandoning his sketch 'somewhere in the basement; I don't know where, and I prefer not to know'. The weight of history, and especially of the quintets of Mozart and Brahms, became a burden, he admits. It was only eight years later, in 2017, that he finally completed his Clarinet Quintet, a near-40-minute *Adagio*.

Naturally the language is different, given the sonic leeway composers have now to exploit sounds, effects and techniques that would have had Mozart and Brahms fleeing for their sanity. Nevertheless, earlier musics remain ghostly presences as Widmann's music breaks out into tonal resolutions or lingers over a reminiscence. Brahms, especially, is certainly there, and I fancy the shade of Mahler flits through fleetingly in places. The work compels on its own terms, and the authority of the performance cannot, of course, be doubted.

As for the Mozart, this is a well-lived-in reading, the shaping by the quartet by now intuitive, the reactions between string ensemble and reed soloist instinctive. Widmann's tone ranges from a *chalumeau* purr to a *clarino* chime and he is matched every step of the way by the Hagen players. The gossamer scales in the *Larghetto* are breathtaking in their hushed stillness, while the Minuet and finale are ideally cheerful and bubbly.

The programme is certainly unusual, and perhaps not one for those who prefer their Mozart to be coupled with Brahms (or more Mozart). Only time will tell if Widmann's Quintet establishes itself alongside them in the repertoire. But get it now, while it's fresh: it's well worth a listen.

David Threasher

'1723'

JS Bach Prelude, Largo and Fugue, BWV545/529. Violin Sonatas – BWV1021; BWV1023 **Bertali** Ciaccona in C **Biber** Sonata V in E minor **Corelli** Violin Sonata, Op 5 No 6 **Pisendel** Sonata in E minor

Nadja Zwiener *vn* **Johannes Lang** *org*

Ramée (RAM2202 • 73')

1723. Are you racking your brains as to what exactly happened 300 years ago that was worthy of an album-shaped celebration from The English Concert's leader Nadja Zwiener and Leipzig Thomaskirche organist Johannes Lang? Well, this was the year of JS Bach's investiture as Leipzig Cantor, and also the construction year of the instruments Zwiener and Lang play. Under Lang's fingers and toes is the single-manual, 14-stop beauty created for the village church of Störmthal near Leipzig by a young Zacharias Hildebrandt, fresh out of his training with master organ builder Gottfried Silbermann – an organ of such outstanding timbral range and tonal beauty that an impressed Bach composed a new cantata for its inaugural service; 2008 saw it restored to its historical state. As for Zwiener's violin, this was made in Rome by David Tecchler, whose mostly Cremonese-inspired instruments also drew to a lesser extent on those of Jacob Stainer, one of whose instruments Bach appears to have owned. Put those two instruments together in repertoire demonstrating Bach's interest in the music of his near and further-flung contemporaries and predecessors, and in conceptual terms alone, '1723' is both a beguiling and a neatly resonant concept.

Most importantly, though, it sounds great. The recording is very lovely for starters – woodily warm, perching us right up alongside them in the organ loft, just close enough to get Lang's softly dancing feet and the tactile movement of Zwiener's strings. This modest-size organ boasts a strikingly attractive tone and a tremendous range of colours. For a bijou-size demonstration of its bell-like high treble sweetness, head to their lighter-than-air reading of the second *Allegro* of Corelli's Sonata in A, Op 5 No 6. Then, for colouristic range, it has to be Lang's radiantly flowing reading of Bach's *Prelude, Largo and Fugue* in C, BWV545 – heard here in its three-movement version incorporating the *Largo* from the Trio Sonata in C, BWV529, which Lang has in turn arranged to incorporate Zwiener's violin – where each multicoloured movement is painted in a new, dramatically potent overall shade.

Zwiener's own fine struttings of her and her instrument's stuff include her intricately thought-through switches of timbre and articulation over Biber's Violin Sonata in E minor. It's impossible to say which instrument is best showcased by Bertali's crazy Ciaccona in C, but either way its tightly interwoven, increasingly ornate counterpoint is every bit the joyous album climax one would hope for in the context of what has already been enjoyed, Zwiener and Lang demonstrating just how far in each other's pockets they are. Essentially, whether a Baroque violin-and-organ recital fits with your usual predilections or not, you should give this a spin. **Charlotte Gardner**

'Songbird'

Beach Romance, Op 23 **N Boulanger** Soleils couchants **Glinka** The Lark **Medtner** Canzona matinata. Fairy Tale, Op 20 No 1 (arr Heifetz) **Fanny Mendelssohn** Erwin, Op 7 No 2 **Rachmaninov** Sing not to me, beautiful maiden, Op 4 No 4 **C Schumann** Romance, Op 22 No 1 **R Schumann** Romance, Op 94 No 2 **Schubert** Fantasie, D934 **R Strauss** Morgen!, Op 27 No 4[a] **Tchaikovsky** None but the lonely heart, Op 6 No 6 (arr Elman)

Maria Ioudenitch *vn* **Kenneth Broberg** *pf* with [a]**Theresa Pilsl** *sop*

Warner Classics (5419 73740-7 • 65')

Unlike most young violinists who devote their debut CDs to flashy repertoire, Maria Ioudenitch puts forth the proposition that the violin is a singing rather than a slashing instrument. The result is an intelligently curated recital with song at the centre. It begins with Romances by Clara and Robert Schumann back to back, both showcasing the warmth and evenness of Ioudenitch's sonority in all registers. Indeed, the full-bodied patina of her sustained double-stops evokes Fritz Kreisler's beefy tone. Her vibrato is generous yet never throbbing, while long melodic lines are both shapely and seamless, as Fanny Mendelssohn's 'Erwin' ravishingly demonstrates.

Nadia Boulanger's 'Soleils couchants' features delicate interplay between the brilliant pianist Kenneth Broberg's supple high-register accompaniment and Ioudenitch's eloquent phrases. It contrasts with the musicians' intense yet flexible interplay throughout Amy Beach's *Romance*, which provides the bridge into a section encompassing Russian Romantic transcriptions of works by Tchaikovsky, Medtner, Rachmaninov and Glinka. Here Ioudenitch and Broberg channel their strong soloist profiles to engaging conversational ends and stylish effect.

Schubert's *Fantasie* has been lucky on record, and this latest traversal does not disappoint. Broberg gives uncommon shape and direction to the first movement's rippling tremolos, which complement Ioudenitch's raptly sustained *cantabiles*. The *Allegretto* boasts both tonal sparkle and rhythmic incisiveness, if not quite matching Szymon Goldberg and Radu Lupu (Decca, 3/81, 4/90) for organic ebb and flow. In the central variations based on Schubert's song 'Sei mir gegrüsst', few contenders surpass Ioudenitch and Broberg for sheer virtuoso sheen, not to mention the clarity and focus

Bringing out the fantasia-like qualities of the Kreutzer Sonata: Antje Weithaas and Dénes Várjon commence a Beethoven violin sonata cycle – see the review on page 55

of the violinist's dazzling pizzicato technique. My only quibble about the final selection, Strauss's 'Morgen', is the halo of reverberation surrounding guest singer Theresa Pilsl, as if her agile soprano voice had been recorded in a different venue and dubbed in after the fact. Should Ioudenitch and Broberg team up again, may I suggest that they record the Medtner violin sonatas? **Jed Distler**

'Spirits'

Brahms Hungarian Dances, WoO1 – No 2; No 6
Debussy Suite bergamasque – Clair de lune
Elgar La capricieuse, Op 17. Salut d'amour, Op 12
Falla La vida breve – Danse espagnole
(arr Kreisler) **Gluck** Orfeo ed Euridice – Melody (Dance of the Blessed Spirits, arr Kreisler)
Kreisler Liebesleid
Daniel Lozakovich *vn* **Stanislav Soloviev** *pf*
DG (486 2492 • 28')

This album is rather jewel-like: small but perfectly formed. Daniel Lozakovich's playing is shimmering and stylish, offering a set of miniatures somewhat reminiscent of a Fritz Kreisler recital. Lozakovich tells us that each piece represents 'a different composer, a different culture … each with their own soulful spirit'. He is referring to legendary violinists such as Ferras, Gitlis, Hassid, Heifetz, Kogan, Oistrakh, and Kreisler. Lozakovich wants to pass on the style of 'these "new" old violinists that not many know, which I believe everyone should know'.

Though still a young artist, he is no stranger to critical acclaim. His Tchaikovsky Concerto (DG, 3/20) topped Mark Pullinger's *Gramophone* Collection of 30 recordings from the past 70 years (1/23). His playing is described as 'white hot' (Marc Bridle), with an 'old-school feel' (Rob Cowan, 11/20), already playing 'like one of the greats, or, better said, like one of the great players of the past' (*Hamburger Abendblatt*, 2019).

The pairing between Lozakovich and pianist Stanislav Soloviev is quite lovely – a very closely matched, refined and sensitive collaboration. The close miking of the violin lends an intimacy to the sound, although the balance could be a bit more equal – Gerald Moore would be pleased if this collaborative pianist could be brought forward in the mix somewhat (and maybe have his name a point or two bigger on the album cover!).

The Elgar pieces offer lovely swooping portamentos and subtle rubato, while the Falla presents fiery leaps and great contrasts, retaining an edginess while also being brave enough to draw us into the whisperingly soft passages. The Gluck transcends the 18th century, timeless in its heartfelt sorrow. The Brahms numbers display a thoroughly enjoyable approach to rubato, magnificently coordinated with Soloviev: winding up, speeding off and then landing or letting the line unravel at phrase ends. It's fantastic – a performance in sepia tones. In Kreisler's *Liebesleid* they display a finely wrought push and pull, microtimings that are the lifeblood of sophisticated playing. However, with Kreisler being the inspiration, Lozakovich could afford to take the gloves off more with his portamentos.

For an album of such small scale, it certainly does not lack in scope or courage. I would have liked to see more gems added to this – for instance the rest of Kreisler's *Old Viennese Dances* – but Lozakovich does not take it easy here, and doesn't play it safe. His playing is well considered and charismatic; he looks to the past for inspiration but isn't scared to make these his own. I'm looking forward to hearing his next leaps into the familiar as well as the unknown. **Amy Blier-Carruthers**

PHOTOGRAPHY: IRENE ZANDEL

Maria Callas

GRAMOPHONE 100 CELEBRATING A CENTURY OF RECORDED CLASSICAL MUSIC

Hugo Shirley carries our centenary series into the 1950s – the decade that marked the greatest achievements of the American-Greek soprano who was also born 100 years ago

Of the many dozens of artists profiled in this feature over the years, can any, I wonder, lay greater claim to truly iconic status – in the sense approaching the word's true meaning – than Maria Callas? She's an operatic singer who transcended, and 46 years after her death continues to transcend, the boundaries of her small corner of the cultural world. Her voice was, and is (thanks to a rich recorded legacy), immediately recognisable like few others'. Her face, similarly immediately recognisable, has become emblematic of the operatic diva. Indeed, Callas is for many the quintessence of opera: she embodies the drama, the passion and, ultimately, the tragedy that makes opera what it is.

This is in no small part down to drama, passion and tragedy in her own life, gleefully amplified and embellished by a gossip-hungry press: the supposed run-ins with opera-house managements and headline-grabbing cancellations; the abandonment of a stable marriage in favour of a fiery relationship with fast-living shipping magnate Aristotle Onassis; the steep decline in her vocal health that followed; and the early death, aged just 53.

Even in the studio Callas can leave you on the edge of your seat as she pushes the boundaries of what the voice can do

It's all too tempting to project Callas's life on to the dramas she portrays on record. To do so, however, is to risk underplaying the astonishing achievements of her career. Indeed, the image of La Divina as celebrity risks overshadowing the hard work that defined not only her early years but also her career throughout the 1950s, the decade of her greatest achievements both in the theatre and on record – a period, it's worth remembering, that ran from her late twenties to her late thirties. Callas was quite simply one of the most prodigious vocal talents of the 20th century, with a career whose wealth of triumph and incident can only be most superficially glossed over in an article of this length.

She was just 13 when she began her formal vocal training in Athens, claiming to be 16 to gain entry to the National Conservatory, before two years later moving to the Athens Conservatoire to study – with utmost diligence and hard work – with Elvira de Hidalgo, who introduced her to *bel canto* repertoire. She sang her first Tosca aged 18. By 1947 she was singing Gioconda in Verona opposite Richard Tucker and with Tullio Serafin conducting, and Serafin invited her to sing Isolde in Venice a few months later, in December. In January 1949 she alternated Brünnhilde in *Die Walküre* (in Italian) and Elvira in *I puritani*, again with Serafin, in what marked a turning point in her career – and it was certainly a noteworthy achievement for a singer still only in her twenties!

Her first records, 78s made for Cetra, followed later that year and it wasn't long before she was snapped up by Walter Legge at EMI, for which she recorded more than

DEFINING MOMENTS

•1923 – *Beginnings in America*
Born Maria Anna Sofia Cecilia Kalogeropoulou on December 2 in New York, where her Greek parents immigated to earlier the same year. Father changes family name to Callas six years later; she starts piano lessons aged eight

•1937 – *Move to Greece*
Moves with her mother and sister to Athens; begins studies at National Conservatory aged 13

•1939 – *Studies continue*
Begins studies with Elvira de Hidalgo and makes stage debut as Santuzza in student production of *Cavalleria rusticana*

•1947 – *Italian debut*
Meets future husband Giovanni Battista Meneghini; makes Italian debut with *La Gioconda* in Verona, conducted by Tullio Serafin

•1949 – *Astonishing feats*
In the space of one month, she performs both Brünnhilde and Elvira (*I puritani*), marking a breakthrough in her career

•1952 – *Starts work with EMI*
Signs contract with EMI; following year, makes her first recording for the company – *Lucia di Lammermoor*

•1956 – *New York debut*
Makes debut as Norma at Metropolitan Opera, where she would have a troubled relationship with general manager Rudolf Bing

•1958 – *High-profile cancellation*
Suffers huge press backlash after withdrawing from gala performance of *Norma* in Rome after Act 1

•1959 – *The Onassis affair*
Begins relationship with Aristotle Onassis after being invited to a party on his yacht; starts to cut down her operatic appearances

•1964 – *Final operatic performance*
July: royal gala performance of *Tosca* with Tito Gobbi at Royal Opera House, London; parts of same production staged in early 1964 were filmed – only extant footage of her on operatic stage

•1974 – *The last concert*
November: gives final public performance in Sapporo, Japan, at end of tour with tenor Giuseppe di Stefano

•1977 – *Dies aged 53*
September 16, Paris, of suspected heart attack

PHOTOGRAPHY: IANDAGNALL COMPUTING/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

20 different operas – some more than once – just as the LP era was beginning in earnest. With guidance from Serafin, though, she moved away from heavier roles to concentrate on *bel canto* repertoire, which she is credited with saving from being the preserve of decorous coloratura sopranos.

Through both her remarkable ability to convey specific character through a voice of astonishing colouristic range and the ability to combine impeccable coloratura technique with heft she brought gravitas to works whose dramatic kernel had largely been obscured. And it was, according to several sources, the related search for theatrical truth that inspired her to lose weight dramatically in the first years of the '50s – a sign as much of her commitment to her art as of the expectations of the time.

She is no less compelling in the many Verdi roles she recorded, or in Puccini. Her most famous recording from this period – and perhaps her most famous complete opera recording of all – is arguably that of *Tosca*, a 1953 set that for a long time was *Gramophone*'s reference for the opera, despite initially being compared unfavourably with the 1952 recording by Callas's great contemporary and (as the press would have it, at least) sworn rival Renata Tebaldi. As recent discussions in these pages have shown (see Classics Reconsidered on the Callas set – 1/19; and Mark Pullinger's *Tosca* Collection – 8/22), the Callas-Tebaldi debate is far from over.

Indeed, judged against Tebaldi's voice (or that of any number of other great sopranos), Callas's itself is not the most appealing: often clotted, sometimes wild, with a pronounced beat at the top even on earlier recordings. But compelling operatic performances have never been just about beauty or perfection, and even in the studio Callas can leave you on the edge of your seat as she pushes the boundaries of what the voice can do.

Anyone who takes a while to warm to Callas and her art is in good company: John Ardoin, co-author of one of the first major studies of the singer (*Callas: The Art and the Life – The Great Years*, 1974), begins his account of her artistry by declaring that he gave away his copy of her 1953 *Lucia di Lammermoor* after just one hearing. When he admitted this to Callas herself, she was unsurprised. 'Generally, I upset people the first time they hear me,' he reports her saying, 'but I am usually able to convince them of what I am doing.' G

THE ESSENTIAL RECORDING

Verdi Tosca
Callas *sop* di Stefano *ten* Gobbi *bar* Chor and Orch of La Scala, Milan / Victor de Sabata
Warner 12/53

Several Callas recordings lay claim to essential status, but perhaps none remains as central – as iconic – as her 1953 *Tosca*. With the support of de Sabata's revelatory conducting and the young di Stefano as a glorious Cavaradossi (not to mention Gobbi's vivid Scarpia), Callas's three-dimensional Tosca is a fully theatrical creation producing a compelling listening experience.

Instrumental

Richard Whitehouse is impressed by a programme of early Scriabin:

'For technical poise and interpretative insight, Daniela Roma is a natural in this music' ▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 65

William Yeoman enjoys Baroque music arranged for guitar:

'Raphaël Feuillâtre's uncommon breadth of spirit shines through every note in this beautiful recital' ▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 67

JS Bach

Keyboard Partitas – No 1, BWV825; No 5, BWV829; No 6, BWV830

Nils Anders Mortensen *pf*

LAWO (LWC1249 • 74')

This is Bach in private mode, intimate, exploratory and rarely demonstrative. Nils Anders Mortensen recorded this first set of three Partitas (the other three will follow in a subsequent recording) in a church in Oslo, which gives the overall texture a liquidity that sometimes makes one wonder if he is over-pedalling. He isn't, but the acoustics warm the sound while softening all the contours.

Mortensen's interpretations use a sharp contrast between long passages in seamless legato and others in persistent staccato mode. His legato mode tends to a tender inwardness, as in the Allemande of Partita No 5. His staccato style can sometimes feel just a bit frantic, as in the strange accents and clipped rhythms of the Courante from Partita No 6 – the tempo isn't unduly fast, yet it feels rushed.

At its best, this is elegant playing, without eccentricity or ostentation. There are no big effects and few moments when one senses the performer in the foreground. But one often feels as if a lot has been left on the table, including a sharper delineation of counterpoint and contrast between voices. The Sarabande of Partita No 6 gets so inward that much of the drama is left by the wayside. A no-drama approach is always welcome in Bach, in theory. But in this case, one wishes for a bit more of a sense of character, variety and interpretative individuality.

Philip Kennicott

JS Bach

Das wohltemperirte Clavier, BWV846-893

Wolfgang Rübsam *lute-hpd*

Brilliant (96750 ⑤ • 6h 3')

Organist, harpsichordist and sometimes pianist Wolfgang Rübsam here performs Bach's monumental *Das woltemperirte Clavier* on a single-manual gut-strung Lautenwerk or lute-harpsichord built in 2015 by Keith Hill. It has two sets of jacks so the player can imitate the ability of a lutenist to move his or her right hand further from or closer to the bridge to change the tone quality.

Like his other Bach recordings using the Lautenwerk, including the *French Suites*, the so-called Lute Suites and beautiful arrangements of the Cello Suites and Violin Sonatas and Partitas, these are revelatory. This is partly due to Rübsam's decision to use 'Bach's manuscript and literally follow the vertical alignment of notes – those meant to be played at about the same time – as they actually appear from Bach's hand in relationship to one another so that, if one pitch appears to the left of another, it is played slightly before those to the right'. This could be framed within the *style brisé* especially favoured by French and German lutenists, whereby not only chords but intervals were habitually arpeggiated or 'broken'. It is Rübsam's default, along with that *cantabile* style of playing which is closer to speech than song, and a generous rubato in the midst of almost exclusively slow tempos.

Sometimes, and the opening C major Prelude of Book 1 is a case in point, listening feels like swimming through toffee. But for the most part, as is the case with Book 1's F sharp minor Fugue, it's more akin to a great mystery being slowly, deliciously revealed, note by note. These are introspective, ruminative, whispered accounts that draw you in. And while Rübsam's style is more suited to those preludes that are freely improvisatory rather than danced, in fugues such as Book 2's A minor or F minor, expositions unfold with a profound sense of submerged splendour. To be sure, this approach, and the other-worldly sound of the Lautenwerk itself, won't be to everyone's taste. But one thing's for certain: you'll never listen to any of Bach's music in the same way again.

William Yeoman

Bortkiewicz

'A Letter'

Consolation, Op 17 No 2. Fantasiestücke, Op 61 – No 2, Ein Traum. Gavotte-Caprice, Op 3 No 3. Lyrica nova, Op 59 – No 1, Con moto affettuoso; No 3, Andantino; No 4, Con slancio. Nocturne 'Diana', Op 24 No 1. Pensée lyrique, Op 11 No 5. Six Preludes, Op 13 – No 4, Appassionato. Ten Preludes, Op 33 – No 7, Andantino; No 8, Andante sostenuto e cantabile. Ein Roman, Op 35 – No 3, Erwachende Liebe; No 7, Ein Brief

Zhenni Li-Cohen *pf*

Steinway & Sons (STNS30129 • 48')

On this release, up-and-coming Zhenni Li-Cohen sets herself a substantial challenge. To begin with, Ukrainian-born Sergei Bortkiewicz is a hard sell. He led a peripatetic life; but while he was constantly uprooted geographically, he remained firmly rooted stylistically – perhaps too firmly for listeners who prefer music that reflects its times. And even for people who don't mind his retrograde idiom and his magpie aesthetic (ideas picked up from Liszt and early Scriabin dot – even dominate – this recital), his music may seem too plain-spoken. He had a gift for melody, but his textural and rhythmic workings are no match for Medtner's.

To compound the difficulties, Li-Cohen focuses on a limited slice of his output. Her sampler gives us selections from across Bortkiewicz's career (not in chronological order – although that hardly matters for a composer who progressed so little); but she represents him primarily with lingering, introspective works infused with nostalgic regret. Thus, she leaves to one side such virtuoso exhibitions as the Études; and

Introspective, ruminative accounts: Wolfgang Rübsam explores the gentler side of Bach's Das wohltemperirte Clavier in his performances on the lute-harpsichord

when picking an excerpt from the *Fantasiestücke*, she chooses the dream piece 'Ein Traum' rather than the dramatic awakening that follows it. Given this inclination towards moderation, the recital could easily sag, especially since Li-Cohen tends to pull back even in those rare moments where the music turns vehement. She plays down the *martellato* marking in the Prelude, Op 13 No 4, for instance; and the final piece from *Lyrica nova* sounds less agitated in her hands than it does in Nadejda Vlaeva's (Hyperion, 3/16).

Fortunately, Li-Cohen has the skills necessary to bring it off: a fluent legato and a refined sense of rubato and phrasing, coupled with an ability to bring out the subtle harmonic surprises that, from time to time, rescue the music from anonymity. Add to this her tonal richness and her exquisite balance (evident in her handling of the decorations in the third of the *Lyrica nova*), and you have performances that will keep you enthralled. I wouldn't want to be without the more vital and wide-ranging collections by Vlaeva and by Pavel Gintov (Piano Classics), but Li-Cohen's may be the most consistently beautiful Bortkiewicz recording in the catalogue. The excellent sound only augments the pleasure.

Peter J Rabinowitz

Gaultier

La rhétorique des dieux – Four Suites

Toyohiko Satoh *lute*

Carpe Diem (CD16331 • 62')

Dipping into and across veteran Japanese lutenist Toyohiko Satoh's recorded catalogue, you can't help but think that for him the European lute is the Zen instrument par excellence. Furthermore, the biwa and its music are never far in the background; nor the Japanese principles of *mono no aware* and *wabi sabi*.

With this selection of suites from Denis Gaultier's 1652 collection *La rhétorique des dieux*, Satoh seems to have found the perfect vehicle further to explore such concepts in music, manipulating tones and textures as an ikebana master would branches and flowers. Silence in the former is given as much emphasis as space in the latter.

Despite using 11 of the 12 Greek modes to organise the collection, Gaultier does not, beyond incidental correspondences, use them to organise his music. No: these are familiar French Baroque dance suites with all the rhythmic, melodic and harmonic formulas and potential for extempore elaboration we have come to expect from such music.

Although he is a supreme stylist, Satoh's priorities here are simplicity and profundity. So while his leisurely tempos are a natural fit for the sarabandes, the courantes and gigues are, even for him, unusually slow. This is marvellous, because we already have players such as Hopkinson Smith (12/77) and Louis Pernot (whose complete 1989 recording is essential – 6/90) to supply the thrills and spills, aesthetically speaking. Satoh's superpower is to make a virtue of the lute's shortcomings, relishing each tone's *morendo* and strumming like a brush calligrapher, each gesture gifting us a musical koan.

William Yeoman

Mozart

Complete Piano Sonatas

Yeol Eum Son *pf*

Naïve (V8049 ⑥ • 6h 24')

Another month, another Mozart sonata cycle, or so it seems. Following on from

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Mao Fujita's largely impressive cycle, here's one from Yeol Eum Son, whose only previous foray into this world was on Neville Marriner's last recording, where she rounded out the 21st Concerto with a couple of solo pieces, including K330 (Onyx, 6/18).

What is immediately striking about her playing is the finesse of her technique, and throughout the cycle she brings to each work a telling transparency, well captured by the recording, and an elegance to her phrasing. These qualities work best in the earliest sonatas, though even by the time of No 6, K284, her way with the theme of the variation-form finale seems a little stiff, lacking the easy conversational style of William Youn or the subtle insights of Mitsuko Uchida. Similarly, as the variations progress, there's a slight arbitrariness to her dynamics and articulation, rather than the clear sense of purpose that can be heard potently in Fujita's account.

Turning to Son's newer reading of K330, this one is a touch more mannered, with a tendency for agogic pauses between phrases in parts of the first movement; on the other hand, the *Andante* is affectingly solemn, its turn into the minor quietly pained. The finale, though, is a little tame, especially alongside the fleeter Fujita, who truly lifts the music off the page.

The more I listened to this set, the more I was struck by a nagging feeling that these are not yet fully formed interpretations, as if Son has not yet fully assimilated them. And that sense was confirmed by the booklet interview in which she admits: 'I had zero intention of making this recording at first', although she goes on to say how comfortable she feels playing Mozart. Maybe therein lies the problem: the result is simply too comfortable – the C minor is particularly emotionally pallid, the fervency of its opening movement passing for little. A moment or two with Víkingur Ólafsson (DG, 10/21) and you're propelled into a far darker world. Son's slow movement also misses the mark, her phrases too short-breathed, the accompaniment at times too present within the balance. By contrast, Ólafsson and Maria João Pires turn this *Adagio* into pure song. The finale takes some moments to get into its stride, its energy only coming through as we reach the explosive *forte*.

Son is on firmer ground with K545, the misleadingly dubbed 'easy sonata', bringing a more natural feel to the first movement than Fujita, whose ornamentation here I found distracting – hers is much more sparing – while its final sign-off has a pleasing simplicity. After a slightly deliberate-sounding *Andante*, her accompaniment less varied than Ólafsson's, she brings a litheness to the finale, its tempo perfectly judged.

By the last two sonatas, again there's plenty of impeccable playing on display, but in their different ways they still short-change on characterisation. The opening *Allegro* of the B flat major, K570, has a grace that beguiles, but the G minor chords that disrupt its serenity (from 0'24") sound a touch too mild-mannered. Interestingly, her slow movement is steadier than Fujita's (whom I found a bit sluggish), akin in speed to Uchida's. But, unlike the latter, Son doesn't sound convinced, so the effect is hesitant, disjointed. The closing *Allegretto* lifts things with a good, lively pace, even if she doesn't conjure the panoply of characters that emerge in Pires's reading. There are issues with K576, too: I want the trilled phrases that respond to the hunting-horn opening to come across as call-and-answer, as Fujita does wonderfully. But here Son introduces a slight delay between them, which sounds fussy and interrupts the flow of the narrative. And although her slow movement has plenty of elegance, she is less reactive to Mozart's subtle shifts of mood than many. The finale rounds off the project with a fine crispness but without coming close to the high spirits of Youn and Fujita. **Harriet Smith**

Piano Sonatas – selected comparisons:

Uchida	*Philips 468 356-2DB5 (2/89)*
Pires	*DG 479 2690 (2/92)*
Youn	*Oehms OC017 (aas – 5/14, 1/17, 9/17)*
Fujita	*Sony Classical 19658 71076-2 (12/22)*

Schubert

Piano Sonatas – No 20, D959; No 21, D960

David Deveau *pf*

Steinway & Sons (STNS30128 • 76')

'Going all over the place, yet going nowhere.' No, that's not an obscure Bob Dylan lyric but rather my reaction to David Deveau wending his way through the opening *Allegro* of Schubert's A major Sonata (No 20), minus its exposition repeat. His reluctance to commit to a firm basic tempo fails to provide an anchoring frame of reference for his expressive speed-ups and slow-downs. Because he underplays dynamic builds at climaxes, the movement's quiet closing gives more the impression of depletion than decompression. Deveau taps into the *Andantino*'s lyrical poignancy, yet parks the anguished central climax in neutral. By contrast, Krystian Zimerman's wailing *fortissimos* pin you to the wall, without spinning out of control (DG, 10/17). The Scherzo is light and supple enough, yet the quick arpeggiated chords and repeated notes lack Alfred Brendel's playful and angular bite (Philips, 4/73). The Rondo is better in that Deveau keeps thematic material and melodic filigree in balance, albeit without Maurizio Pollini's deft transitions (DG, 4/88).

The B flat Sonata's *Molto moderato* (without the repeat) straddles between the exposition's directness and simplicity and fussy point-making that undermines the development section's flow. In the Scherzo, Deveau telegraphs the accented bass notes' syncopated surprise by slightly elongating the notes before them. The well-played Rondo falls slightly short of the dramatic contrast and forward momentum distinguishing pianists as divergent as Perahia, Richter, Lupu and Fleisher. However, Deveau creates a hypnotic and sustained atmosphere in the slow movement by maintaining a steady grip on the left-hand ostinato, over which he spins out flexible and gorgeously shaded *cantabiles*. So here's the question: is one magical movement worth the price of an otherwise underwhelming Schubert release? **Jed Distler**

Scriabin

'Visionary and Poet'

Allegro de concert, Op 18. Étude, Op 2 No 1. Twelve Études, Op 8. Fantasy, Op 28. Two Impromptus, Op 12. Six Preludes, Op 13

Daniela Roma *pf*

Dynamic (CDS7984 • 64')

If not a debut, this release introduces Daniela Roma to a wider listenership with its judicious overview of Scriabin's 1890s output. An exception is the Étude in C sharp minor which, like Rachmaninov's prelude in this key, became a calling-card that rather outlived its purpose.

Roma plays it with due eloquence, then is no less assured in the Études that encapsulate the young composer as they range from the laconic dexterity of the earlier items to those more substantial later pieces. In particular, the *Tenebroso* and *Alla ballata* define the quixotic moods of much that came after, while the feverish intensity of *Patetico* ensured it remains a popular encore. Roma has the measure of the sequence overall, then is hardly less inside

the set of Preludes with its dignified initial *Maestoso* and tensile closing *Presto*, but the Impromptus require more definition for their contrasts to register most fully.

The extended pieces that frame this collection would ideally have been reversed (and Danilo Prefumo's detailed annotations rather suggest as much). Roma astutely controls the blustery virtuosity of the *Allegro de concert*, though she might have balanced the emotional force of the *Fantasy* with even greater awareness of that formal ingenuity which, far more than the symphonies on either side, makes it the conceptual forerunner of the final six piano sonatas.

None of these works lacks comparisons – Piers Lane (Hyperion, 12/92) in the Études, Valentina Lisitsa (Decca, 1/16) in the *Allegro* or Alexander Melnikov (Harmonia Mundi, 7/06) in the *Fantasy* – but for technical poise and interpretative insight, heard in warmly immediate sound, Roma is a natural in this music.

Richard Whitehouse

'Piers Lane Goes to Town Again'

B Adams Illuminations – La tristesse amoureuse de la nuit **Albéniz** Cantos de España, Op 232 – Seguidillas **JS Bach** Solo Cello Suite No 6, BWV1012 – Sarabande (arr Jacobson) **Botsford** Black and White Rag (arr Atwell) **Charlton** Fantasie-Mazurka **Constable** A Slinky Foxtrot, 'Nocturne' **Godard** Mazurka No 2, Op 54 **Liadov** I danced with a mosquito, Op 58 No 4 **Liszt** Venezia e Napoli, S162 – Tarantella **Loeillet** Keyboard Suite in E minor **Mayerl** Railroad Rhythm **Mozart** (attrib) Das Butterbrot, K*Anh*284*n* **TK Murray** Danse barbaro **Saya** Habaneras **Schubert** German Dances and Sentimental Waltzes (from D779, 783 & 790, ed Hess). Rosamunde – Ballet Music (transcr Godowsky) **Szymanowski** Mazurkas, Op 50 – No 1; No 2

Piers Lane *pf*

Hyperion (CDA68163 • 82')

It is a decade since Piers Lane last went to town (10/13) and his latest visit there was completed only in March 2022, having begun at the end of 2015, recorded (over a generous five days in two sessions, I note) at Potton Hall with A-listers Ben Connellan as engineer and Rachel Smith as producer. The selection here focuses on the dance and, as Lane notes in his extensive and genial booklet essay, contains pieces he has mainly performed as encores, mixing the well-known with works especially composed for him: 'the noble and contemplative alongside the populist and humorous'. It's a concept that others of a similar temperament – notably his Hyperion stablemates Hough and Hamelin – have revelled in.

Among those of an earlier generation was Shura Cherkassky, whose LP 'Kaleidoscope' provided a template. Indeed, Lane opens with a Suite in E minor of which Cherkassky was fond (you can hear this inimitable master of the encore playing it live in 1982 on Ivory Classics 70904). Presented in a different order and ascribed, Lane tells us, to the wrong composer – not Jean-Baptiste Lully (1632-87), as had always been thought, but Jean Baptiste Loeillet 'of London' (1680-1730) – the Suite's five short movements are quite as beguiling in Lane's hands as they were in Cherkassky's. Almost all the 17 titles here have some career connection to the pianist, personal taste dictating which will appeal more than others. Myra Hess's selection of 13 Schubert dances and waltzes is another highlight (Lane ran the annual Myra Hess Day from 2006 to 2014), as are his exuberant dispatch of 'Seguidillas' (Albéniz) and *Black and White Rag*, and his poised, graceful handling of Godard's charming Mazurka and the Schubert-Godowsky *Rosamunde* ballet music. You can easily imagine the audience's indulgent end-of-recital smiles over *Das Butterbrot* (Litolff possibly, probably not Mozart).

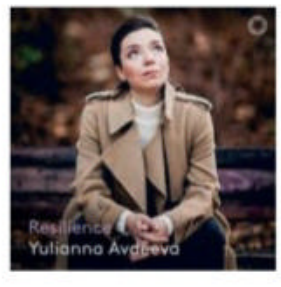
Elsewhere, Liszt's Tarantella, though dashingly executed, is missing the thrilling daredevilry of, say, Sergio Fiorentino (2/63) or Boris Berezovsky (live in 2009 – Mirare, 5/10); and Susan Tomes on her wonderful Billy Mayerl album 'Loose Elbows' (2/90) keeps a firmer rhythmic grip on *Railroad Rhythm*. For me, TK Murray's *Danse barbaro* (2005) and even Szymanowski's two Mazurkas sit uncomfortably in this sweet shop. None of which is sufficient reason to dissuade me from commending this return visit with enthusiasm. **Jeremy Nicholas**

'Resilience'

Prokofiev Piano Sonata No 8, Op 84 **Shostakovich** Piano Sonata No 1, Op 12 **Szpilman** Mazurek. Suite, 'The Life of the Machines' **Weinberg** Piano Sonata No 4, Op 56

Yulianna Avdeeva *pf*

Pentatone (PTC5187 073 • 74')



Concept albums are well and good when the concept is sufficiently poetic, provocative or enigmatic to intrigue or encourage rather than confine the listener's imagination. Stephen Hough's 'La vida breve' was one such (Hyperion, 2/21). With the best will in the world, and with all due acknowledgement of its pianistic excellence, Yulianna Avdeeva's 'Resilience' is not. In ascribing the concept both to the programme and to each individual piece, she imposes a narrower viewpoint than either the music or her playing deserves.

Shostakovich's 1920s grimacingly avant-gardist First Piano Sonata, for example, does so much more than 'destroy to make new ways'. Certainly it flirts with iconoclasm, chaos and mysticism. But Shostakovich's 'new way' was in fact strongly indebted to Prokofiev's Third Sonata, and in places also to Scriabin. Arguably, too, it would prove more of a dead end than a path to the future. None of which makes the sonata less than a compelling piece, and Avdeeva is a brilliant exponent of its mercurial changes and wholly undaunted by its technical demands.

If Shostakovich had ever contemplated a third piano sonata, it might easily have taken a shape not unlike Weinberg's Fourth. In terms of Weinberg's own output, this feels something like a companion piece to his wonderful Fifth Violin Sonata, Op 53. Both works show him re-individualising his own voice and reconnecting with his ethical concerns after the paralysing traumas of the late Stalin years. Avdeeva's interpretation more than stands up beside its modern rivals. The trouble is that Gilels's premiere recording (Melodiya) makes all others seem as though looking from the outside in – right from the opening bars, in fact, where he conveys a greater sense of alarm, as if a protagonist were being watched and pursued. In the folk-like second movement Avdeeva is sensitive to the polyphony and intriguingly off-centre moods. But again when compared to Gilels, dramatically speaking hers is a paler and more one-dimensional depiction of the increasing sense of menace and the growing tension: qualities that Weinberg develops in his intimate third movement and Jewish-inflected finale.

Władysław Szpilman makes an ideal pairing for Weinberg, at least as far as their backstories go. But beyond the tortured symbol of indomitable Polishness, familiar from Polansky's *The Pianist*, there was a pre-war cosmopolitan *style mécanique* exponent. The 1933 Suite *The Life of the Machines* is a clamorous Prokofievian concoction ending in a frantic whirlwind finale that also tips its hat to Bartók.

Avdeeva reveals her finest qualities as an interpreter in Prokofiev's monumental

A conversation with the Baroque: Raphaël Feuillâtre presents a series of arrangements that demonstrate the many facets of the classical guitar

Eighth Sonata. The opening is flexible yet tense, never too personal, imbued with a subtle undercurrent of apprehension. The second movement could perhaps be even more shadowy than she makes it, but the precise articulation and soaring élan of the finale certainly rise impressively above the turmoil. Here too, then, Avdeeva is a match for almost all modern rivals. Yet, as with Gilels in Weinberg, there is a classic version to contend with, this time in the shape of Richter (the DG studio account, not the more fallible live BBC one). Richter's slightly slower opening, with its more strongly profiled spasmodic intrusions, conveys greater inner strength, as do his phenomenal sonic resources on the way to the first movement's dramatic apex, which leads into the PTSD-style battered numbness of the recapitulation. The conceptual integrity of such playing speaks for itself. **Michelle Assay**

'Visages baroques'

JS Bach Concerto (after Vivaldi), BWV972. Partita No 1, BWV825. Prelude and Fugue in C, BWV846. Solo Violin Partita No 3, BWV1006 – Gavotte en Rondeau **Duphly** La Forqueray. Médée **Forqueray** La Bellmont **Rameau** Les Cyclopes. L'entretien des muses **Royer** L'aimable

Raphaël Feuillâtre *gtr*
DG (486 4073 • 62')

French guitarist Raphaël Feuillâtre, here making his DG debut in fine style, says 'Visages baroques' refers to the 'different qualities' acquired by the pieces in arrangement and to 'the many facets of the guitar' revealed through those pieces.

The recital is more than that. It comprises linked portraits of the originals, hung in a gallery that occasionally veers into a baroque/Baroque hall of mirrors with transcriptions of transcriptions. It is therefore also a series of conversations. Finally it is, of course, a portrait of the guitarist himself.

Listen, for example, to Feuillâtre's bouncy ritornellos, musical phrasing and shapely cross-string trills in Judicaël Perroy's audacious arrangement for solo guitar of Bach's audacious arrangement for solo harpsichord of Vivaldi's D major Violin Concerto, Op 3 No 9. The effect of such an account relies in part on being preceded by Feuillâtre's own masterly arrangement of 'L'aimable' from Joseph-Nicolas-Pancrace Royer's *Pièces de clavecin* in an exquisite performance laden with myriad niceties of touch, tone and tempo. In short, Feuillâtre dares to exhibit personality, and the Rameau, Forqueray and Duphly likewise benefit, as does the superb account of Bach's Partita in B flat, BWV825, in a skilful arrangement by Gerhard Reichenbach. The classical guitar is very good at this. Witness the decades of transcriptions and arrangements from harpsichord originals, born not just of necessity due to an impoverished repertoire but because of the guitar's suggestiveness and ability to preserve many of the harpsichord's evanescent charms.

For me, the gold standard for the performance of Baroque music (derived from harpsichord originals or otherwise) on the classical guitar is still David Russell. His Bach, his Handel, his Couperin, his Scarlatti: all are incomparable for style, musicality and beauty of tone. Although there is no overlap of specific pieces here, as I listened I wished at times for a similar breadth of conception. Nevertheless, Feuillâtre more than compensates with an uncommon breadth of spirit that shines through every note in this beautiful recital. **William Yeoman**

PHOTOGRAPHY: STEFAN HOEDERATH

Steve Reich

Pwyll ap Siôn looks at how the US composer has harnessed characteristics of the human voice and language to create his own sound

Ten years after its first outing, *Gramophone*'s Contemporary Composers series comes full circle with a return to Reich, one of today's leading figures, to explore in depth a particularly distinctive and influential element of his work.

The Steve Reich Collection in the Paul Sacher Foundation archive in Basel, Switzerland, includes a recording of one of his earliest surviving compositions: on May 15, 1961, students at the Juilliard School of Music (where the 24-year-old composer was studying at the time) played through his *Music for String Orchestra*. Echoes of Webern, Schoenberg and mid-period Bartók can be heard in the two-minute, 12-note-based piece, but one would be hard-pressed to identify the American's distinctive language in its intense expressionistic and epigrammatic gestures.

Reich had not found his true musical voice at this point, but by the time he returned to New York from San Francisco in late 1965, all the main elements were in place. The distinctive new language is heard in two landmark tape compositions dating from this time: *It's Gonna Rain* – one of the last pieces he completed on the West Coast before moving back to New York; and *Come Out*, composed the following year.

Instead of setting texts in the conventional sense Reich was, in effect, 'setting human beings'

How did this happen? Perhaps more importantly, what caused it to happen? *It's Gonna Rain* and *Come Out* are rightly regarded as important early examples of Reich's phasing technique – a discovery the composer chanced upon when he accidentally aligned two identical loops on two separate tape machines of a phrase ('it's gonna rain') spoken by Pentecostal preacher Brother Walter. As the loops circled round, both machines started running at slightly different speeds, gradually moving out of sync with each other. Phasing was invented.

It's Gonna Rain and *Come Out* blurred the space between speech and sound, linguistic sense and purely musical meaning, while the kaleidoscopic acoustical effects of shifting phrase patterns created an entirely different aesthetic experience and new way of listening. Reich had reinvented the rulebook, prompting critic Andrew Clements to suggest in 2010 that he belonged to 'a handful of living composers who can legitimately claim to have altered the direction of musical history'.

While Reich's phase-shifting process could not have occurred without the aid of technology, his choice of speech recordings to realise this idea was equally important. In fact, speech, sound, tone, language, the grain of the voice – and how they combine to create their own musical universe – have accompanied Reich's creative journey from the very beginning. Discussing *It's Gonna Rain* with composer David Lang in his

Early-career Reich: by 1965 he was well on the way to finding his true musical voice

2022 book *Conversations*, Reich states that these early works were his 'vocal music'; except, instead of setting texts in the conventional sense he was, in effect, 'setting human beings'.

Why did Reich gravitate towards this element, and when did he first consider applying paralinguistic features – pitch, melodic shape and contour, intonation, gesture, timbre – to his musical language? The answer can be found in a variety of places, but one thing seems clear: the musicality of voices was something that struck Reich from a young age.

In Reich's *Different Trains*, for string quartet and tape, composed in 1988, speech samples can be heard throughout the work, including those of retired Pullman porter Lawrence Davis and several Holocaust survivors (Rachella, Paul and Rachel). However, the first voice we hear is that of Reich's governess Virginia Mitchell.

The context of her inclusion requires further explanation. Reich's parents separated when he was a year old, so his early childhood was often marked by long periods when the most important voices were absent. Accompanying the young boy on several extended train journeys from New York, where his father lived, to his mother's home in Los Angeles, Virginia's voice formed an ever-present part of his upbringing.

The voice of his mother, June Carroll (née Sillman), was also important, of course. After all, she was a gifted Broadway singer who starred in the musical revue *New Faces of 1952*. Musical theatre also brought Reich closer to words and music. As Stephen Sondheim remarked in a conversation with Reich on stage at the Lincoln Center in 2015: 'Steve … has made pieces out of the way people talk [and] I do the same thing.'

When Reich was a composition student at Juilliard he attempted to set William Carlos Williams's poetry to music, but found that his efforts only managed to 'freeze' its flexible American speech-derived rhythms. It dawned on him then that spoken language – either recorded or transcribed – might form a basis for musical expression. Others before him had explored similar ideas: Bartók's extensive field trips, recording and transcribing folk music in Hungary, Romania and other eastern European countries, rubbed off on the Hungarian composer's musical style; while Janáček saw speech melodies as 'windows into people's souls'.

REICH FACTS

Birth New York, October 3, 1936
Studies Philosophy (BA, Cornell University, 1953-57). Composition: with Hall Overton (privately, 1957-58); with William Bergsma and Vincent Persichetti (Juilliard School of Music, New York, 1958-61); with Luciano Berio and Darius Milhaud (MA, Mills College, Oakland, California, 1961-63)
Breakthrough work *Drumming* (1970-71)
Breakthrough recording 'Music for 18 Musicians' (ECM, 1978)
Awards for recordings and compositions *Different Trains*: Grammy – Best Contemporary Composition, 1989. 'Music for 18 Musicians' (Nonesuch): Grammy – Best Small Ensemble Performance, 1998. Double Sextet (2007): Pulitzer Prize for music, 2009. Third Coast Percussion's 'Steve Reich' (Cedille): Grammy – Best Chamber Music/Small Ensemble Performance, 2016
Other prizes and awards 1994: elected to American Academy of Arts and Letters. 1999: Commandeur de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, France. 2005: MacDowell Colony Medal, US. 2006: Praemium Imperiale, Japan. 2007: Polar Music Prize, Sweden. 2012: Gold Medal in Music, American Academy of Arts and Letters. 2013: BBVA Foundation Frontiers of Knowledge Award, Spain. 2014: Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement in Music, Venice Biennale. 2016: Michael Ludwig Nemmers Prize, Northwestern University. 2016-17: Richard and Barbara Debs Composer's Chair, Carnegie Hall
Honorary doctorates Liszt Academy, Budapest (2006). Juilliard School of Music, New York (2009). Royal College of Music, London (2016)

Another important formative influence was Austrian-born British philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, whose theories would have been familiar to Reich from his time as a philosophy student at Cornell University (1953-57). It's easy to overplay Wittgenstein's impact on Reich, but some parallels are simply too obvious to ignore. Many relate to language and speech. Wittgenstein's early work explored language in its purest form as a series of logical propositions and statements about the world; but his later thoughts (which interested Reich) came about through on-the-ground, empirical observations about language in all its messy, uncontainable multiplicity – what Wittgenstein called 'language games'.

To cite one example, in his *Philosophical Investigations* (published posthumously in 1953) Wittgenstein writes that, 'The essence of speech is the composition of names.' In 1967, Reich created a tape piece called *My Name Is*, where each voice marks its own lexical sonic imprint. It was effectively a musical realisation of Wittgenstein's idea.

Non-Western cultures offered yet another dimension where language, speech and music intersected. Having been introduced to non-Western music at Cornell by music professor William Austin, Reich read ethnomusicologist Arthur Morris Jones's writings on African music a few years later after attending a lecture at the Ojai Music Festival by jazz scholar and composer Gunther Schuller. (Berio, Reich's composition teacher at Mills College, who also explored the musicality of speech in tape pieces such as *Omaggio a Joyce* (1958), took Reich over there for the talk.)

One of Reich's early composition sketchbooks contains a passage copied from a book on African music by Jones which reads as follows: 'African melody has grown up in association with words … melodies rarely, if ever [are conceived] in the form of abstract music.' Jones goes on to say that many African languages are 'tonal', in that, 'Every single word and syllable … has its proper tone pitch in the sentence.' Musical sounds, rhythms and patterns are thus built into the very fabric of certain languages.

When speech rhythms are thrown into the music-linguistic mix alongside speech melodies, a broader and more extensive picture starts to emerge. In Reich's musical language, rhythm, pulse and repetition constitute the music's heartbeat while melodic patterns and harmonic cycles make up its syntax and grammar. The formal and intellectual embodiment of these ideas is realised through intricate contrapuntal techniques and layers, rhythmic and melodic development, multiples of the same instruments, cyclical structures and logical formal processes.

It is perhaps possible to exaggerate the importance of speech patterns on Reich's music, but its influence cannot be denied in some of his most significant works: string quartets such as *Different Trains* and *WTC 9/11* (2010), large-scale multimedia works *The Cave* (1990-93) and *Three Tales* (2002), or more 'conventional' text settings such as *Tehillim* (1981), *The Desert Music* (1982-83), *Proverb* (1995), *You Are (Variations)* (2004) and *Daniel Variations* (2006).

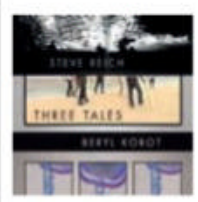
The balance between mind and body, the cerebral and corporeal, often lies at the heart of great works by composers from Pérotin to Bach, Stravinsky to Messiaen, and Ives to John Adams. In Reich's case, the speech impulse – and its embodiment in (and through) sound – is key in revealing some of his music's hidden treasures. G

REICH ON RECORD

Inspired by voices, texts and the sounds of speech

The Desert Music
Chorus Sine Nomine; Lower Austria Tonkünstler Orchestra / Kristjan Järvi
Chandos (9/11)
Reich's starting point for *The Desert Music* was transcriptions of William Carlos Williams reading his own poetry. Reich's setting perfectly captures the rhythmic qualities of the text while Williams's ominous message of nuclear catastrophe took the composer down darker and more unsettling harmonic pathways. Michael Tilson Thomas's excellent original 1984 recording is matched by this dynamic and energetic performance.

Different Trains
Kronos Quartet
Nonesuch (6/89)
By the end of the 1980s, technology in the form of samplers had finally caught up with Reich's creative ambitions to the point where in *Different Trains* he could weave together a powerful personal narrative set against the backdrop of the Holocaust – combining historiography and autobiography. The work's success prompted scholar Richard Taruskin to claim that Reich had now earned his place 'among the great composers of the [20th] century'.



Three Tales
Synergy Vocals; Steve Reich Ensemble / Bradley Lubman
Nonesuch (1/04)
The speech recordings contained in Reich's three-act opera *The Cave* largely dictated its musical content, but the composer took the opposite approach in *Three Tales* by making the samples fit the music. The material lent itself in this way because, as Reich noted, 'It was just interesting documentary material, and I could do whatever I wanted with it.' The result is a musically driven work with text and music forming a more equal and balanced partnership.

PHOTOGRAPHY: BETTY FREEMAN/BRIDGEMAN IMAGES

Vocal

Alexandra Coghlan hears the debut of countertenor Alexander Chance:
'Chance's tone is pellucid; notes fall round and clear as water drops – it's a really outstanding instrument'
▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 77

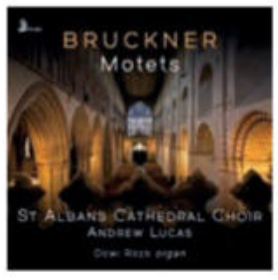
Edward Breen visits the Mantuan court with ensemble Biscantores:
'This is a near-perfect album – bright, sprightly, responsive and clear'
▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 78

Bruckner

Afferentur regi. Ave Maria. Christus factus est. Ecce sacerdos magnus. Inveni David. Locus iste. Os justi. Pange lingua. Postlude. Prelude and Fugue. Salvum fac populum tuum. Tantum ergo – in A flat; in D. Tota pulchra es. Vexilla regis. Virga Jesse

St Albans Cathedral Choir / Andrew Lucas with **Dewi Rees** *org* **Joe Arnold, Rory Cartmell, Matthew Lewis, Becky Smith** *tbns*

First Hand (FHR143 • 68' • T/t)



Recorded collections of Bruckner's motets are not as common as one might expect. For a start they require a full-bodied (though highly flexible) choir, capable of switching in an instant from the majestic to a hushed intimacy, as well as a large acoustic, a quartet of trombones and a powerful organ. Blessed with the longest nave of any English cathedral, St Albans copes easily with Bruckner's frequent pauses and demanding wide dynamic range. Andrew Lucas's three dozen singers are on impressive form, combining tonal beauty with sheer stamina.

Ecce sacerdos (1885) makes a solid and arresting opening track, with the trebles – topping a seven-part texture – soaring effortlessly up to their high B flats, ably supported by the brass and organ. For Bruckner this marks the extent of any hint of theatricality in his writing. There are two settings of *Tantum ergo*, both early works from the mid-1840s, and are typical of Bruckner's *a cappella* style; subtle yet supple. The best known of his unaccompanied motets, *Locus iste* (1869), flows beautifully and serenely. *Vexilla regis* makes an austere contrast, with some memorably resonant singing from the second basses; darker still is *Inveni David*. Here, the trombone quartet packs a mighty punch.

Philip Salmon's tenor solo in *Tota pulchra es* is a special treat. Equally arresting is the contribution of baritone William Houghton in the five-part setting of *Salvum fac populum tuum*. The disc concludes with *Christus factus est* in the later 1884 unaccompanied setting. Here Bruckner luxuriates stylistically following his exposure to *Parsifal*, the St Albans choristers fervent in their exultations. Dewi Rees contributes a pair of welcome organ solos: the workmanlike Postlude in D minor (1846) and the Prelude and Fugue in C minor (1847). The careful ordering of works, taking into account the succession of keys, scoring and moods, contributes to a deeply satisfying recital. My only small quibble would be about the lack of Germanic Latin pronunciation.

Over the past 40 years, two Hyperion discs have set the standard in this repertory: those by the Corydon Singers under Matthew Best and by Polyphony under Stephen Layton. This splendid new release will take some supplanting.

Malcolm Riley

Motets – selected comparisons:
Corydon Sgrs, Best *Hyperion CDA66062 (3/83, 7/86)*
Polyphony, Layton *Hyperion CDA67629 (11/07)*

Chesnokov

All-Night Vigil, Op 44[a]. All of Creation Rejoices, Op 14 No 11. The Angel Cried Out, Op 22 No 18[b]. Cherubic Hymn, Op 7 No 1. Salvation is Created, Op 25 No 5

[b]**Jessica Kinney** *sop* [a]**Natalie Manning** *contr* [a]**Tom Butler** *bar* **St John's Voices; Cambridge University Chamber Choir / Graham Walker**

Naxos (8 574496 • 66' • T/t)

The music of Pavel Chesnokov (1877-1944) is well known in the Orthodox choral world but far less well outside it. He had a thorough musical training over the course of his childhood and studied composition with Taneyev, Ippolitov-Ivanov and Conus, and as well as being a very prolific composer was a highly respected choir director. In 1944 his thoroughgoing *The Choir and How to Direct* was published and (surprisingly) proved a great success.

To my knowledge, this is the first recording dedicated exclusively to Chesnokov's work by British singers, and it provides an excellent showcase for his work, in chronological order. It begins with an 1897 setting of the *Cherubic Hymn* from the Divine Liturgy of St John Chrysostom, and follows this with three of his best-known works, *Spaseniye sodelal* ('Salvation is Created'), *Angel vopiyashe* ('The Angel Cried Out') and *O Tebe raduyetsia* ('All of Creation Rejoices'), before a sequence of 10 settings from the *All-Night Vigil* of 1912. The performances really project the drama of these works (try the startling 'Svetisya, svetisya' from *Angel vopiyashe*, for example). Like Rachmaninov, Chesnokov wanders in and out of chant melodies – this was the period at which entire repertories of Russian monophonic chant were being rediscovered in parallel with the innovative choral style, the 'New Trend' developed by these composers, Kastalsky and others – and, in similar fashion, these melodies become part of the composer's own vocabulary, since he both respects them and knows how to construct his own vocabulary from them.

Though they are not quite as memorable as the famous Rachmaninov, the settings for the *All-Night Vigil* should be much better known: they include a 'Blazhen muzh' with a highly affecting bass solo, dramatic, freely composed settings of 'Svete tihiy' and 'Nine otpushchayeshi' and memorably sonorous settings of 'Voskreseniye Hristovo videvshe' and 'Vzbrannoy voyevode'. Performances throughout are excellent, and the recorded sound (the recording was made at St John's College Chapel, Cambridge) resonant but clear enough that every word may be understood.

Ivan Moody

Crane

Natural World

Juliet Fraser *voice/Casio kybd* **Mark Knoop** *pf/elecs*

Another Timbre (AT210 • 55')

Ensemble Les Surprises reimagine festivities in Venice, with sacred music by Monteverdi and instrumental works of his contemporaries – see review on page 78

PHOTOGRAPHY: YANN GACHET

Is it too soon to call a work ‘classic Crane’? Well, I’m going to go ahead and say that *Natural World* for soprano and piano/sampler is classic Crane. Commissioned by Juliet Fraser, the Oxford Lieder Festival and Musica Sacra Maastricht, *Natural World* brings together the ecstatic stillness of nature and the mundane ordinariness of reading a science article. At almost an hour in length, it is Crane’s longest concert piece to date, and last year it won the Small Chamber Ivor Novello Award.

Natural World draws on the American marine biologist Rachel Carson and, Crane says, ‘continues my preoccupation with the poetic qualities of factual, list-based texts’. The voice, in repeated tonally inflected phrases, sings about ecological life in strings of neutral terminology (‘winter visitor … great northern diver … dead leaves … grain, grass and other vegetation …’). After a while the soprano drops semantics altogether and, in counterpoint with the piano, sings wordless glissandos and melismatic-style flourishes. The piano style is spare, characterised by Satie-style I/IV triads, pentatonicism, and Feldmanesque repetition and variation. In the fermatas between phrases, sampled birdsong starts appearing. In the last part, ‘Seascape’, which features maritime sounds, Fraser is accompanied by sustained Casio keyboard tones, the work eventually ending on a bright sixth chord.

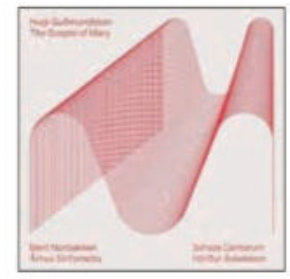
But description only goes so far here. If I were pushed further, I might say that this album evokes the humdrum delirium of a person dozing in a deckchair in their garden on a summer afternoon, a broadsheet over their chest, the sound of birdsong mixing in their dreaming mind with a half-read newspaper article on climate change, English whimsy radiating in light rays through cloud cover. At least, that’s how it sounds to me. Perhaps the highest compliment I can pay the album is that it’s art, it’s challenging, it’s distinctive and it really does politely ask you, dozing in your deckchair, to engage with and try to make sense of it. **Liam Cagney**

Guðmundsson

The Gospel of Mary

Berit Norbakken *sop* **Schola Cantorum Reykjavicensis; Aarhus Sinfonietta / Hörður Áskelsson**

Dacapo (8 224736 • 61’ • T)



Following Sono Luminus’s recording of chamber works by Hugi Guðmundsson (1/23), Dacapo brings us the Icelandic composer’s oratorio *The Gospel of Mary*, distilled from the ancient text of the same name by Danish librettists Nila Parly and Niels Brunse. It is an account of the death and resurrection of Christ by one of the few individuals to have witnessed both, Mary Magdalene (evidently the first to meet the risen Jesus). The work was premiered in Iceland by forces including Schola Cantorum Reykjavicensis, who travelled to Aarhus in Denmark to make this recording with the Aarhus Sinfonietta in 2022.

Guðmundsson’s score pivots on the friction between Mary’s account of what happened and that of Peter, the apostle who refused to believe that Jesus would have confided in a woman. The structural lead of Bach’s passions is faintly felt, the music progressing through arias and chorales with occasional bursts of instrumental drama and five cleansing meditations for solo instruments. Here

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the chorus moves much of the narrative forwards, its male members embodying a stentorian, dense, defensive counterpart to the nuanced, reflective, feminine presence of Mary, strongly felt here courtesy of Berit Norbakken's clarion-clear soprano, laden with feeling and channelling some enraptured music.

Guðmundsson's almost neo-Baroque aesthetic helps amplify the comparison with Bach, along with an unmistakable sense of residual pain and the feeling of a rhythmic tread that could have come straight from one of his Passions. Taken as a whole, however, the work can feel uneven and occasionally incongruous. Moments of striking rapture mingle with stock devices and a certain textural and harmonic naivety that may serve a broader purpose but grate on the ear in the context of the expression elsewhere.

The best moments have a Bryars-like sense of space and harmonic import or, in contrast, thickets of dense instrumental conversation like Bach's *St John Passion*. The five instrumental meditations are immensely effective and beautifully crafted, as is the start of the Postludium, which echoes Chou En-lai's valedictory line in *Nixon in China*: 'to work'. On the flipside are passages that, to my ears and given what we know about this composer's abilities, feel either unduly misty-eyed or simply unwieldy.

Andrew Mellor

Maconchy · Vaughan Williams

'Songs, Vol 2'

Maconchy The Disillusion. The Exequy. The Garland. How Samson Bore Away the Gates of Gaza. In Fountain Court. The Poet-Wooer. Sailor's Song of the Two Balconies. Sleep brings no joy to me. The Swallow **Vaughan Williams** Four Last Songs. The House of Life

James Geer *ten* **Ronald Woodley** *pf*

Resonus (RES10317 • 77' • T)

Three cheers for this valuable second helping of songs by Elizabeth Maconchy (1907-94) courtesy of those adventurous folk at Resonus Classics (I waxed lyrical about the first volume in the May 2022 issue). Nearly all remain unpublished – and, in the case of 'The Exequy', this is almost certainly its first-ever performance. An exciting discovery it proves, too, a profoundly affecting setting from 1956 of lines from a lengthy poem by Henry King, Bishop of Chichester (1592-1669), written in response to the death of his wife Anna aged just 23. Striking, too, is the 1937 version of the scena 'How Samson Bore Away the Gates of Gaza' – the earliest of no fewer than four arrangements Maconchy left us of this eponymous poem (subtitled 'A Negro Sermon') by the American modernist Vachel Lindsay (1879-1931). Published by Chester Music in 1984, the four disarming numbers that make up *The Garland* date back to 1938 and, along with 'The Swallow', derive from translations made by the composer's husband William LeFanu (1904-95) from the *Anacreontea*, an anthology of 62 poems in the style of the Greek lyric poet Anacreon (two companion settings – 'Love stood at my door' and 'The Bee-Sting' – have already appeared on Vol 1). In addition, we get settings from 1941 of poetry by Maconchy's fellow Anglo-Irish contemporary Sheila Wingfield (1906-92), namely 'Sailor's Song of the Two Balconies' and 'Disillusion'; a powerful treatment from 1937 of Emily Brontë's 'Sleep brings no joy to me'; and two student offerings from 1928 and 1929 respectively, 'The Poet-Wooer' (after Ben Jonson) and 'In Fountain Court' (to words by Arthur Symons). Suffice it to say, James Geer and Ronald Woodley lend wonderfully sympathetic, keenly intelligent advocacy.

As before, songs by Vaughan Williams (Maconchy's immensely supportive teacher at the RCM) make up the remainder. Good to see the 1903 cycle *The House of Life* (a sequence of six sonnets by Dante Gabriel Rossetti) getting some proper attention in recent years. Outstanding versions include those from Roderick Williams (do try and hear his own exquisite orchestral version with Mark Elder and the Hallé, 1/23) and Kitty Whately (Albion, 12/19) – and I can report that Geer's tenor version complements them most pleasingly (the much-loved 'Silent Noon' remains vernally fresh, while the far-flung ambition of 'Love's Minstrels' in particular registers strongly). He's also a persuasive exponent of the *Four Last Songs* (1954-58) to poems by the composer's second wife, Ursula – that fleeting reminiscence of 'Linden Lea' at the very end of the lullaby 'Tired' is deeply touching. And a special word of praise again for Woodley's superior, delectably supple pianism throughout.

Lovely sound, admirable presentation. Make no mistake, this is a very good disc indeed. **Andrew Achenbach**

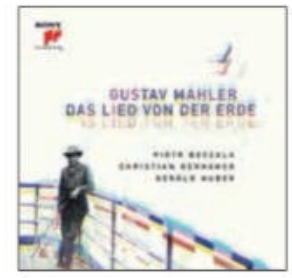
Mahler

Das Lied von der Erde

Piotr Beczała *ten* **Christian Gerhaher** *bar*

Gerold Huber *pf*

Sony Classsical (19658 79570-2 • 59' • T/t)



Nearly a decade after his last Mahler album – his *Gramophone* Award-winning collection of orchestral songs (6/15) – Christian Gerhaher returns to Mahler with the composer's piano version of *Das Lied von der Erde*.

It's the second recording of the work in its more intimate guise to come my way this year, following that from Claudia Huckle, Nicky Spence and Justin Brown (Champs Hill, 3/23), but the first to be recorded by a baritone and tenor. In many ways, the involvement of Gerhaher makes the recording *sui generis* anyway: for the baritone songs, we are immediately transported to a unique interpretative world of special delicate colouring, of quiet, considered intensity and poetic power.

As we've come to expect, Gerhaher and the superb Gerold Huber are interpretatively at one throughout – listen to the way they let in the light at 'Sonne der Liebe' in 'Der Einsame im Herbst' (from 7'40"), or their interplay in the first minutes of 'Am Ufer' (as Mahler originally titled 'Von der Schönheit'). 'Der Abscheid', meanwhile, though relatively swift by the clock, is almost hypnotic in its power, with singer and pianist taking full advantage of the intimacy of the piano version to draw the listener in.

For his part, Piotr Beczała sings fearlessly – heroically, even – in the high tessitura of 'Das Trinklied vom Jammer der Erde' and 'Der Trinker im Frühling', and he offers delicacy in 'Der Pavillon aus Porzellan' (aka 'Von der Jugend'). Throughout, one can only marvel at the tenor's vocal security, even if I miss the variety and colouring of the text that we get from Spence. Captured in the studio a couple of months before Gerhaher's interpretations, it's perhaps inevitable that Beczała's feel like they inhabit a different world – an impression emphasised by the different way the baritone is spotlit by the engineers.

With beautiful recorded sound from Sony, though, there's a huge amount to admire here, and Gerhaher's songs, in particular, make a persuasive case for hearing the piano version of the work. Recommended.

Hugo Shirley

Mozart

Requiem, K626

Rachel Redmond *sop* **Marianne Beate Kielland** *mez* **Mingjie Lei** *ten* **Manuel Walser** *bar* **La Capella Nacional de Catalunya; Le Concert des Nations / Jordi Savall**

Alia Vox (AVSA9953 SACD • 45')

Jordi Savall has recorded Mozart's Requiem before, in 1991, when everybody and his dog was doing so. That recording wasn't greeted with much enthusiasm – Stanley Sadie thought it '[no] more than a superficial account of the work' – but it has remained in the catalogue, thanks not least to reissues both on its original label and more recently on Savall's own.

The new recording, while not markedly different in matters of interpretation, could certainly not be described as superficial. Tempos have barely altered three decades on but the performance is tauter, with what seemed 'jaunty' to SS now put over with an injection of urgency. That's not a matter of speed but of attack and coordination. Historically informed playing techniques (and standards) have undergone a revolution over this period and what audibly defeated those pioneers during the last-but-one Mozart year is now tackled with far greater fluency. SS admired the choral singing on the old recording, and that quality is reprised here; the solo singing, though, is vastly improved, the quartet blending well, Rachel Redmond a straight-toned soprano, not far from the style of the late Montserrat Figueras. Some may find Manuel Walser's baritone somewhat on the light side, too perfunctory for the announcement of the Last Trump.

Once again, the 'Rex tremendae' is taken almost at a jig tempo, Mozart's crotchet exclamations of 'Rex' sung as quavers. The 'Agnus Dei' is taken at a fairly leaden plod as in 1991 but the 'Recordare' and 'Benedictus' flow more persuasively in the new recording. The version used is predominantly the traditional Süssmayr completion, with details borrowed from the 1971 Beyer edition: look out for touches such as modified brass in the 'Dies irae', wind in the 'Domine' and strings in the 'Hostias'. The old recording came in at just over three quarters of an hour and was coupled with the *Masonic Funeral Music*. Only half a minute has been shaved off the Requiem in the new version but there is no coupling. **David Threasher**

Selected comparison:

Savall (r1991) *Alia Vox AVSA9880 (11/92)*

Puccini

Messa di Gloria[a]. Capriccio sinfonico. Crisantemi. Scherzo per archi

[a]**Charles Castronovo** *ten* [a]**Ludovic Tézier** *bar* [a]**Orfeó Català; Luxembourg Philharmonic Orchestra / Gustavo Gimeno**

Harmonia Mundi (HMM90 5367 • 69' • T/t)

Few would argue that Puccini's *Messa a quattro voci con orchestra* (more commonly known as the *Messa di Gloria*) is a masterpiece but it provides ample evidence of the young Puccini's impressive talent. It's a fluent, enjoyable work in which the composer's family background – he came from a long line of church musicians – can be clearly heard, not least in some very nifty contrapuntal writing.

There are, perhaps inevitably, echoes of Verdi, as well as certain moments that wouldn't necessarily strike more northern European ears as sounding terribly Mass-like: the perky 'Gloria', the jolly march that emerges in the 'Qui tollis' or an *Agnus Dei* with an easy-going oom-cha accompaniment that brings the work to an unprepossessing close. But taken as a whole – and listened to with an open mind – it's a satisfying work.

And it receives a satisfying, serious performance here from Gustavo Gimeno, the Luxembourg Philharmonic Orchestra and venerable Catalan chorus Orfeó Català. Gimeno paces the work beautifully and his orchestra play well, with plenty of detail and dynamic subtlety – climaxes are kept on a tight leash and carefully controlled. Orfeó Català prove themselves both agile and flexible but sometimes lack bite and heft; they are not helped by being set back a little in the balance. The two solo parts are short, but they are luxuriously cast: Ludovic Tézier rich and authoritative, Charles Castronovo ardent and urgent.

It's interesting to compare the recording with Antonio Pappano's highly praised account with the London Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, which is an overall more operatic and dramatic affair, with the chorus more immediate and the young Roberto Alagna an unbeatable tenor soloist; I find it more fun, I admit. Gimeno's more sober approach is undoubtedly a valid one, though, and with much to enjoy in the couplings – further early works, engagingly performed – this is certainly an album that's worth a listen. **Hugo Shirley**

Selected comparison:

LSO, Pappano *Warner Classics 557159-2 (10/01)*

Schnittke

Psalms of Repentance

Cappella Amsterdam / Daniel Reuss

Pentatone (PTC5187 028 • 41' • T/t)

Schnittke's set of *Psalms of Repentance* ('Verses of Repentance' is a more accurate translation) is some of the most challenging choral music in the repertoire. Its 12 movements portray a spiritual journey that begins with Adam weeping outside the gates of Paradise and ends in a textless evocation of eternity.

The texts are not liturgical, so Schnittke was under no constraints in terms of the kind of music he could write, or of its technical complexity. And complex it certainly is: notes must sometimes be plucked from the air, clusters balanced against solo lines in unexpected bitonal combinations that suddenly clear into a blaze of bright tonal light. Mention is made, incidentally, of the unreliability of the Belaieff edition and the fact that Cappella Amsterdam used the original manuscript – in fact there is a new score published by Compozitor in St Petersburg in 2017, edited by Aleksey Vulfson and the present writer, which addresses the difficulties noted. This is important because it affects the actual notes in several of the movements, not to mention dynamics.

Cappella Amsterdam handle all these difficulties with panache. The singers are as at home with Schnittke's tortured canonic writing as they are with the flashes of tonal (or modal) calm and bursts of sunlight. Tuning is impeccable, as is the pronunciation, though the recording perhaps lacks quite the sense of sonic depth of the Swedish Radio Choir under Tõnu Kaljuste. There are also recordings by the Danish National Radio Choir under Stefan Parkman (Chandos, 2/97) and the RIAS Chamber Choir under Hans-Christoph Rademann (Harmonia Mundi, 5/16), and any Schnittke enthusiast will want all four, but I would say that the choice essentially comes down to the Swedish and Dutch recordings. **Ivan Moody**

Selected comparison:

Swedish Rad Ch, Kaljuste *ECM 453 513-2 (5/99)*

Sørensen

St Matthew Passion

The Norwegian Soloists' Choir; Ensemble Allegria / Grete Pedersen

BIS (BIS2611 SACD • 65' • T)

Mezzo-soprano Eva Zaïcik captures the spirit of Armenia on her new album of songs by Komitas and his spiritual heir, Garbis Aprikian – see review on page 77

Patior – to suffer: that's the verb at the root of any Passion. Bach's settings put suffering front and centre, carved out in jagged choral counterpoint for the crowds in the *St John*, weeping through the arias of the *St Matthew*. For many years Danish composer Bent Sørensen was determined to write his own Passion – one that puts love, rather than suffering, at its core: 'a journey towards Crucifixion, but even more a journey towards Resurrection'.

Premiered in 2021 and now recorded for the first time by Grete Pedersen, Ensemble Allegria and The Norwegian Soloists' Choir, it's an extraordinary statement that arrives late in a singular career. All Sørensen's sound experiments at the brink of silence, his play with darkness and light, his blurring of textural edges come into (or, perhaps, out of) focus in this large-scale work for choir, soloists and orchestra that invites the listener on a journey through the mist.

While fragments of St Matthew's Gospel and the traditional Passion narrative do remain, they are cut up into tiny scraps and restitched together with words from six other poets including Anna Akhmatova, Emily Dickinson and Søren Ulrik Thomsen. The effect is at once coherent and disjointed. Like ceramicists in Japanese *kintsugi* who repair broken bowls with gold, drawing the eye to the cracks, celebrating their hazard-lines and chance patterns, so Sørensen creates a strange and beautiful order. It helps that in The Norwegian Soloists' Choir he has a group perfectly designed for a piece in which solo voices surface rather than stand apart, always part of a continuous texture.

We open in mist, musical lines slipping and sliding over one another, bells chiming distantly. Melodies surge and build (*Gramophone* critic Andrew Mellor's description of Sørensen's music as 'crammed with as much beauty as tastefully possible' holds truer than ever) but always obscured or occluded. The violin stirs briefly, a sort of ghost-cousin to Bach's D minor Chaconne, at the start of 'Betania'; rapturous, Straussian strings are peremptorily pulled up short by trumpets in 'Psalm'; a familiar melody resurfaces, soothing the orchestra in 'Tenebræ'. Balance and counterbalance are set aside in the central setting of Dickinson's 'Wild Nights', strings fizzing, shuddering with intensity, a swarm of sounds shooting and coalescing. It's spiritual and sensual – at once an act of transgression and redemption.

Pedersen holds all these shards in place, creating both clear architecture in her pacing and balance of instruments and voices (impeccably captured here by producer Jens Braun) and space within that structure for expressive detail and, of course, the all-important silences. It's a virtuoso account of a piece that takes the spirit of Bach and says something quite new. **Alexandra Coghlan**

Van Helmont

Leçons de Ténèbres

Scherzi Musicali / Nicolas Achten *org*

Ricercar (RIC454 • 71' • T/t)

Charles Joseph Van Helmont (1715-90) was a church musician who spent most of his working life at the collegiate church of St Michel et Ste Gudule in Brussels, where he had trained as a boy: first as organist then, after a gap of four years, as *maître de chant*. He retired in 1777 and was

succeeded by his son, Adrien Joseph. His *Ténèbres* settings for soprano and continuo were composed in 1737 for Notre Dame de la Chapelle, the parish church where he was *maître de musique* before resuming his employment at Ste Gudule. They are in the usual form of nine *leçons*, three each for Holy Wednesday, Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. In 1756 he wrote one more of each of the latter two days.

Given that the words are from the Lamentations of Jeremiah, the music is surprisingly, almost relentlessly upbeat. The *leçons* end with (in Latin) 'Jerusalem return to the Lord thy God'. Even at the first appearance of the injunction the mood is distinctly cheerful; by Good Friday, the congregation can enjoy hearing a jolly triple-time dance. The music, quite Italianate, is varied – a walking bass here, a dotted rhythm there – but the overall effect is one of blandness. Only occasionally, such as at 'Aedificavit in gyro meo' ('He hath builded against me') in the third *leçon* for Thursday (1737), does Van Helmont give a chromatic twist to the predominantly major-key diatonicism. In 1756 Van Helmont wrote two more isolated *leçons*, for Thursday and Friday. These benefit greatly from the addition of an obbligato cello, which duets with the voice. The Good Friday *leçon* is an elaboration of its 1737 predecessor, with vigorous roulades towards the end.

Three sopranos sing turn and turn about: all with bright tone, Deborah Cachet warmer than Wei-Lian Huang and Griet De Geyter. The recording was made in Belgium at the St Hilarius church, Bierbeek, the beautifully restored 1775 organ played by Nicolas Achten dominating the continuo group: so much so, indeed, that it's quite hard to hear the theorbo and harpsichord. Valentin Bajou moves from bass violin to expressive cello for the 1756 numbers. Achten also gives neat performances of the six organ fugues. The performances are accomplished, but Van Helmont doesn't really deserve such devoted treatment. **Richard Lawrence**

Vivaldi

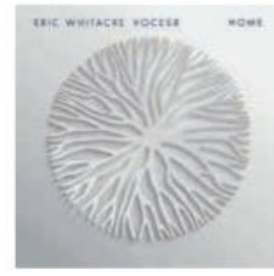
Serenata a tre, 'Mio cor, povero cor', RV690
Marie Lys *sop* **Sophie Rennert** *mez*
Anicio Zorzi Giustiniani *ten*
Abchordis Ensemble / Andrea Buccarella
Naïve (OP7901 • 72' • T/t)

Of Vivaldi's three surviving serenatas, this one is the least-known, well behind *La Senna festeggiante*, of which there are at least four fine recordings. In Vivaldi's day a serenata was a concert-length work for vocal soloists and orchestra, usually ordered by a wealthy patron to celebrate an event such as a family wedding or an important visit. Its unvarying sequence of arias and recitatives made it look and sound much like an oratorio or unstaged opera, save that it would have the slimmest plot it could get away with, was often performed outdoors, and served mainly as a vehicle for an attractive and undemanding musical entertainment that perhaps took the trouble to flatter its generous commissioner – in this case a French count living in Venice, probably for his wedding in 1718. It's a brief Vivaldi was ideally equipped to fulfil, and this work – whose only dramaturgy is that a nymph, in love with a handsome shepherd who is too proud to embrace true love, entraps him at last, only to reject him out of hand for punishment – is a delight from start to finish. I can only think that the lack of a proper title is what has prevented it from making more of an impression on the world, for this is Vivaldi at his most beguiling: unfailingly attractive arias, quick and clever recitatives, and everywhere that special *plein air* summer-evening atmosphere that is uniquely his, especially when embracing the plentiful nature imagery put in its path by the anonymous librettist.

The Abchordis Ensemble under Andrea Buccarella impressed me much with their album of soprano cantatas in a previous volume of Naïve's Vivaldi series (1/22; this one is Vol 70) and they do not disappoint here. The three singers are excellent, especially sopranos Marie Lys as the nymph Eurilla and Sophie Rennert as her confidante Nice, both of whom combine clarity and pleasing tone with impressive technical control, and are pure pleasure to listen to. Listen to Lys in the horn-hewn hunting aria 'Alla caccia d'un core spietato', or Rennert in 'Ad infiammar quel seno'. Tenor Anicio Zorzi Giustiniani is not quite as vocally secure as the others but he certainly sounds the part as Alcindo the preening shepherd. And just like in that cantata recording, the instrumentalists show wonderful skill and intelligence in the art of accompanying vocal music of this kind, living every affect and using a well-stocked continuo section with great imagination and sensitivity. This may be a minor corner of the Vivaldi canon but it's a gem. And I look forward to hearing these musicians in a full-scale opera sometime soon.
Lindsay Kemp

Whitacre

'Home'
All seems beautiful to me. Go, lovely rose. The Sacred Veil[a]. The Seal Lullaby[b]. Sing Gently[b]
Voces8 / Eric Whitacre with [a]**Emma Denton** *vc*
[ab]**Christopher Glynn** *pf*
Decca (485 3970 • 73' • T)



For fans of Eric Whitacre's velvety cushions of vocal balm, the opening tracks of Voces8's new disc will bring a sense of welcome familiarity and contentment. *Go, lovely rose* is the earliest work included, dating from 1992. Here are all the essential Whitacrian hallmarks: an unhurried tempo, syllabic word-setting, close-harmony clusters and a plenitude of generally soothing homophony. One of his most popular pieces, *The Seal Lullaby*, receives a beautifully wistful performance, as does the serene *Sing Gently*, which grew out of his sixth Virtual Choir pandemic initiative. Christopher Glynn's contribution at the piano is faultless. The most recent piece (2022) is a setting of the fifth section of Walt Whitman's *Song of the Open Road* ('All seems beautiful to me'). Here Whitacre creates a palpable sense of the poet's 'great draughts of space' with his eight-part voicings. This is a perfect gem.

The major part of the recording is given to *The Sacred Veil*, a 12-movement cantata composed in 2019 to commemorate the death from ovarian cancer of Julie, wife of the poet Charles Anthony Silvestri. With Emma Denton's cello adding a ravishing eloquence to the choral/piano mix this (at times very) harrowing work reveals a much darker harmonic language, a galaxy away from his more populist works. Unsparing in his use of dissonance, Whitacre manages to illuminate the despairing sense of death and loss with an intimate refinement coupled with an increasingly soaring choral complexity. Whitacre handles the climaxes with tremendous assurance, especially in the *a cappella* penultimate movement, 'You rise, I fall', which – at nine and a half minutes' duration – grips the listener with its dramatic sirens and emotional disintegration. By contrast, the concluding, coda-like 'Child of wonder' delivers a calming transcendency.

Under the composer's gentle direction, this generously filled recording will undoubtedly achieve widespread acclaim, and deservedly so. Voces8 are the perfect match for this repertory, with a first-rate recording capturing their trademark acoustic 'halo'. **Malcolm Riley**

‘Così amor mi fa languire’

Anonymous Cadute erano alfine[a]. Dalle pene amorose[b]. In solitaria parte[b] **Carissimi** Semplicetta beltà[a] **Castaldi** Tasteggio soave[a] **Rossi** Furie d’Averno[c] **Stradella** Dopo incessante corso[c] **Tricario** Su, di sdegno s’armi il petto[a]
[ab]**Anne-Sophie Honoré,** [ac]**Julia Wischniewski** *sops* **Andreas Linos** *va da gamba* **Benjamin Narvey** *chitarrone* **Sam Crowther** *hpd/dir*
Evidence (EVCD095 • 73’ • T/t)

Restless and exciting in equal measure, these committed performances are convincing from the first dramatic intake of breath as they tussle with the ardours of love. In fact, Sam Crowther says he wanted voices to capture ‘the full range of colours and registers’, and this he has certainly achieved. Soprano Anne-Sophie Honoré thrillingly encapsulates the dawning dread of awakening from a sweet dream to face the disappointments of reality in the anonymous *Dalle pene amorose* (‘Of love’s torments’) exactly as if one had stumbled upon her tumultuous internal monologue.

This bundle of very particular and intense emotion grew exponentially when I switched to listening on headphones: the added intimacy made for a real head-in-harpsichord moment that reminded me how much cantatas, and especially continuo cantatas, are enhanced by the physicality of performance. And for these performances, the closer you can get the better, particularly in Benjamin Narvey’s chitarrone solo and Carissimi’s sensual duet cantata *Semplicetta beltà* (‘Innocent beauty’), in which Honoré is joined by soprano Julia Wischniewski, whose slightly richer voice adds new realms of colour to this show-stopper of overlapping, intertwining lines.

As so often in Italian cantatas, the emotions are very particular, and fleeting. I returned many times to *Dopo incessante corso di lagrime* (‘After shedding endless tears’), Stradella’s study of grief, for Wischniewski’s superbly controlled high register. But it was, perhaps, the final, anonymous cantata, *Cadute erano alfine* (‘Fallen at last’), in which Helen of Troy confronts herself in a looking glass, that moved me the most. With the precision of a pair of silver trumpets, the moralistic duet ‘Deh, mirate, o ciechi amanti’ (‘Ah, see, blind lovers’) is a reminder that such cantatas often spoke to a particular audience in-the-know. There are layers of reception history here we may never uncover, but with performances as good as this it’s fun to imagine the possibilities. **Edward Breen**

‘Drop not, mine eyes’

Campion The cypress curtain of the night. I care not for these ladies. Never weather-beaten sail **Danyel** He whose desires are still abroad. Mrs ME her Funeral Tears for the Death of her Husband. Pavan **Dowland** Can she excuse my wrongs?. Captain Digorie Piper, his Galliard. Flow, my tears. In darkness let me dwell. I saw my lady weep. Mignarda. Praeludium **Ford** Fair, sweet, cruel. What then is love **Lully** Entrée d’Apollon (arr Visée) **Purcell** An Evening Hymn, ‘Now that the sun hath veiled his light’, Z193. O solitude, my sweetest choice, Z406 **Visée** Prelude
Alexander Chance *counterten*
Toby Carr *lute/theorbo*
Linn (CKD711 • 66’ • T)

When it comes to countertenor Alexander Chance, son of Michael Chance, the Adam’s apple doesn’t fall far from the tree. After becoming the first countertenor to win the International Handel Singing Competition last year (also walking away with the Audience Prize), Chance now releases his debut recording: a programme of English song with lutenist Toby Carr. And it’s a thing of beauty.

Chance’s tone is pellucid; notes fall round and clear as water drops – it’s a really outstanding instrument, fuller and straighter-toned than his father’s, with a lovely softness at the bottom. His restraint is admirable – not overworking songs by Dowland, Campion and Purcell, whose crisp outlines are so much of their charm – as is his control, showcased best in the Purcell: the unbroken horizon-line phrases of ‘An Evening Hymn’, the silky melismas of ‘O solitude’.

These are well-known works: a serious statement of intent from a young singer who could have hedged his bets with unusual repertoire or programming, but instead gives us a classic recital that maps directly on to extant recordings by Bowman, Blaze, Scholl and Davies, among others. It invites comparison, and Chance more than holds his own.

The disc’s theme is melancholy, and it’s in the lighter moments – the courtly role-play of ‘Can she excuse my wrongs’; the knowing ‘I care not for these ladies’, with its ‘wanton country maid’ who ‘never will say no’ – that Chance shows perhaps too much taste and understatement. Just a little twinkle in the eye, a lifting and lightening of tone and dance rhythms, might give us the ebb to balance a disc that flows in full vocal spate much of the time.

Carr’s delicate touch supplies attractive lute solos by way of interludes, including a ravishing little Prelude by Visée and a Mignarda by Dowland that sings with contrapuntal clarity. All ease and intimate gesture, they’re a good foil to Chance’s more assertive delivery. It’s a lovely pairing, and a recording in which Chance stakes serious claim to the title of his generation’s most exciting British countertenor.
Alexandra Coghlan

‘Mayrig’

‘To Armenian Mothers’
Aghabab Jan, ay loosin! (Djan, ah, the Moon!) **Aprikian** Lamento. Lullaby. Petite suite nuptiale **Ganatchian** Lullaby **Komitas** Akh, Maral djan (Oh dear Maral). Antuni (Song of the Homeless). Chinar es, keranal mi (You are tall like a plane tree). Dances – No 1, Erangi; No 4, Shushiki; No 5, Et-arach. Dsirani dsar (Apricot Tree). Erkink‘n ampel ē (The Sky is Cloudy). Garun a (It is spring). Hoy, Nazan im (Hey, my dear Nazan). Kaqavik. K‘ele, k‘ele (March, March). K‘eler, tsoler (He walked radiant). Krunk (The Crane). Lullaby. Shogher djan (Dear Shogher)
Eva Zaïcik *mez* **David Haroutunian** *vn*
Xénia Maliarevitch *pf*
Alpha (ALPHA947 • 69’ • T/t)

Who was Komitas? He was an Armenian priest, composer, choirmaster and ethnomusicologist, born Soghomon Soghomonian (1869-1935), and is widely considered the founder of the Armenian national school of music. In 1906, after a concert and lecture in Paris, Claude Debussy, no less, knelt before him, kissed his hand and exclaimed: ‘I bow before your genius, Reverend Father.’ During the Armenian genocide in 1915, Komitas was deported to a prison camp by the Ottoman government, from which he emerged mentally scarred.

Komitas’s music has made a few appearances in *Gramophone*’s pages, notably an album of music for violin and piano by Sergey and Lusine Khachatryan (Naïve, 1/16). It has an appealing, folk-like quality and his music forms the basis of this attractive album from French mezzo-soprano Eva Zaïcik, pianist Xénia Maliarevitch and Armenian violinist David Haroutunian.

‘Komitas is the voice of the land of Armenia, of its churches and stones, which for thousands of years have remained

silent', writes Haroutunian in the booklet note. Their album pays tribute to Komitas, along with his heir, the French-Armenian composer Garbis Aprikian, a pupil of Olivier Messiaen, now 97 years old. Aprikian's *Petite suite nuptiale*, composed for his son's wedding, makes use of melodies his emigrant father sang to him when he was a child in Alexandria.

Titled 'Mayrig: To Armenian Mothers', the album has a haunting, nostalgic quality, the songs mainly lullabies (three are titled as such) or folk melodies, many in arrangements for the chamber forces here. It includes a short work each by Parsegh Ganatchian and Hakob Aghabab.

Zaïcik has a lovely, light mezzo, with beautiful *cantabile* lines. In his booklet note, Aprikian praises her meticulous pronunciation. Even Komitas's dances for piano have an elegiac quality, played felicitously by Maliarevitch. Haroutunian's violin tone is silky without being saccharine. This album was obviously a labour of love, which comes across in both the performances and the presentation (song texts printed in beautiful Armenian script along with French and English translations). It should appeal to anyone curious to discover more about the roots of the Armenian musical tradition.

Mark Pullinger

'Nuit à Venise'

Cavalli Missa concertata – Agnus Dei **GB Fontana** Sonata No 16 **Grandi** Il primo libro de motetti – O quam tu pulchra es **Legrenzi** La cetra: Sonato a quattro No 6 – Adagio. Sacri e festivi concenti – De profundis. Prosa pro mortuis – Ingemisco. Oro supplex. Compiete con le lettanie & antifone – Salve regina **Lotti** Crucifixus a 8 **Merula** Canzoni overo sonate concertate – Ballo detto Eccardo **Monteverdi** Selva morale e spirituale – Dixit Dominus II; Laudate Dominum I. Longe mi Jesu (Parlo, miser, o taccio?). Pulchrae sunt genae tuae (Ferir quel petto, Silvio?). Madrigals, Book 5 – Troppo ben può **Rigatti** Messa e Salmi ariosi – Magnificat **Rossi** Il primo libro delle sinfonie et gagliarde – Gagliarda detta La Massara; Gagliarda detta La Norsina; Sinfonia grave

Ensemble Les Surprises / Louis-Noël Bestion de Camboulas *org/hpd*

Alpha (ALPHA927 • 69' • T/t)

Louis-Noël Bestion de Camboulas explains that 'A Night in Venice' aims 'to reimagine a large-scale evening of festivities on the Piazza San Marco and in the Basilica, but also in the gardens and salons of the city's palaces … a night of festive celebration … [that mingles] the sacred and profane, the intimate and the grandiose, dance and contemplation'. The concept should not be taken seriously: our 70-minute stroll around La Serenissima starts in about 1607 and finishes approximately 100 years later (a long evening by any standard), and it encompasses brief samples of at least eight different church services happening in a topsy-turvy ecclesiastical world in which two different Vespers (each with music from the 1640s) can both occur before two different Masses. In reality, this is a fun excuse for an entertaining mixture of Venetian church music interspersed with seven brief instrumental pieces mostly by composers who were employed in Cremona, Brescia and Mantua. There are also two sacred contrafacta of dissimilar Monteverdi madrigals (Ambrosius Profe's version of 'Parlo, miser, o taccio?' and Aquilino Coppini's parody of 'Ferir quel petto, Silvio?').

Ensemble Les Surprises kick off with a playful interpretation of Monteverdi's second *Dixit Dominus* from *Selva morale e spirituale* (1641); the expressive flexibility of eight singers is matched stride for stride by the ensemble of two violins, one cornett, viola da gamba, dulcian, theorbo and harpsichord, directed from the organ by Bestion de Camboulas. Grandi's three-voice *O quam tu pulchra es* (*Il primo libro de motetti*, 1610) is sung by male voices with seductive tenderness. Rigatti's *Magnificat* from *Messa e Salmi ariosi* (1643) has a lightness of touch yet also moments of splendour, such as a gutsy cornett fanfare, thrusting dulcian and declamatory tenor in the arioso 'Fecit potentiam'.

Quicksilver recorders in the rushed start of Monteverdi's *Laudate Dominum omnes gentes* (*Selva morale*) are unconvincing, although descending chains of chromaticism at the words 'nos misericordia eius' are handled wonderfully, and the small choir embraces rising dissonances and harmonic inflections fulsomely in Lotti's eight-voice *Crucifixus*. The lament 'Oro supplex' from Legrenzi's *Prosa pro mortuis* (a setting of the *Dies irae*, *c*1688) is performed dulcetly by countertenor Paulin Bündgen in dialogue with violin and recorders. There is a tender fusion of madrigalian clarity and sacred piety in Legrenzi's *Salve regina* (*Compiete con le lettanie & antifone*, 1662).

Alpha's woefully inadequate booklet fails to identity the origins of almost all of the featured music and does not credit soloists properly.

David Vickers

'Splendours of the Gonzaga'

'Sacred Music from Wert to Monteverdi' **Franzoni** Dixit Dominus VI toni **Gastoldi** Magnificat VIII toni. Regina coeli **Monteverdi** Cantate Domino. Confitebor III alla francese. Laetaniae della Beata Vergine **Pallavicino** Dum complerentur. Misericordias Domini **Rossi** Keter yitnu. Yesusum midbar **Wert** Adesto dolori meo. Omnis homo primum. Speremus meliora omnes

Biscantores / Luca Colombo

Arcana (A545 • 63' • T/t)

This second disc from the relatively new ensemble Biscantores has had a long gestation: recorded in September 2020 as Europe slowly emerged from Covid lockdowns, it took nearly three years to be released, but it has been worth the wait. As specialists in late Renaissance and Baroque music, Biscantores present an interesting and varied programme from the Mantuan court of the Gonzagas spanning the foundation of the Basilica Palatina di Santa Barbara and its cappella in 1565 to the sack of Mantua in 1630.

The programme opens with Monteverdi's delightful earworm, *Confitebor III alla francese* from his 'Moral and Spiritual Forest', *Selva morale e spirituale*, published in Venice in 1640. I've long admired the recording by Cantus Cölln and Konrad Junghänel (Harmonia Mundi, A/01) but Biscantores have an edge: where Junghänel's quicksilver tempo made ornaments sparkle, Colombo's broader pace reveals a fond, mesmeric quality. Notable too is the brightness of sopranos Francesca Cassinari and Vera Milani.

The programme remains strong as it moves into less familiar territory. Monteverdi's predecessor Benedetto Pallavicino is a welcome find: knowing only his madrigals on a 2013 recording from Daltrocanto (Pan Classics), the *Dum complerentur* recorded on this new album is a text that offers both restraint as well as madrigalian opportunities, and Biscantores find a superb balance between the two extremes with their tight blend and warm, clear tone. Salamone Rossi's *Keter yitnu* is also an ear-catching track: Rossi was both a viola da braccio player and instrumental leader for the Gonzagas in the second half of the 16th century.

This is a near-perfect album – bright, sprightly, responsive and clear. If I'm being picky, I would prefer them to invoke a sense of grandeur in several works without such ponderous tempos. I'm swayed, of course, by knowing Wert's *Adesto dolori meo*

An off-duty ensemble with nothing to prove: The Bevan Family Consort offer a wide-ranging choral programme with care, musicality and bags of personality

in the brassy sonorities of Capilla Flamenca and Oltremontano (Passacaille) but Biscantores have plenty of time to hone that sort of gravitas in future. **Edward Breen**

'Vidi speciosam'

D Bevan Magnificat septimi toni **Infantas** Dignare me laudare te **Croce** In spiritu humilitatis **Holst** Ave Maria. Nunc dimittis **Lobo** Versa est in luctum **Palestrina** Sicut cervus **Parsons** Credo quod redemptor **Stanford** Beati quorum via **Tallis** O sacrum convivium **Victoria** Missa Vidi speciosam
The Bevan Family Consort / Graham Ross
Signum (SIGCD746 • 61' • T/t)

You can quibble over the details, but when it comes to adult, mixed-voice choirs – chamber, chapel, church or cathedral – the English sound is, for better or worse, a standardised affair. There are a few outliers (I Fagiolini; BBC Singers; Exaudi) but otherwise all are within millimetres of one another in pursuit of a particular tone and colour we all recognise.

Step forward The Bevan Family Consort – an off-duty ensemble with nothing to prove and no interest in toeing the line. The Bevan musical dynasty – England's answer to the von Trapps – has been woven through the fabric of British musical life for decades. Back in 1975, the original siblings banded together to form the Bevan Family Choir and released their first LP. Now a new generation of cousins, a mixture of 15 amateur and professional singers led by household opera-names Sophie and Mary Bevan, have rebooted the project.

Vidi speciosam, conducted by Graham Ross, is a homage to David Bevan – linchpin of Bevan musical history, and responsible for shaping a distinctive legacy and style at Our Most Holy Redeemer in Chelsea. Repertoire reflects his tastes, and booklet notes (and the odd new edition) by Francis Bevan tie works by Palestrina and Victoria, Holst and Stanford into a very personal family narrative.

It's a refreshingly old-fashioned recital. Classics (and the odd surprise) with Victoria's *Missa Vidi speciosam* as the centrepiece are delivered with care, musicality and bags of personality. No pinprick sopranos here but soft-focus haze and blossomy, full-throated warmth: the Raymond Leppard of choral tones. The top line sets the tone for all below, but the men come into their own in plainchant that ebbs and flows with instinctive, well-trodden ease.

It's an approach better suited to some works than others. Lobo's *Versa est in luctum* takes on almost Straussian lushness, and both Holst motets – the upper-voice *Ave Maria* and the expansive *Nunc dimittis* – radiate and shimmer, as does Stanford's lovely *Beati quorum via*, growing from delicate beginnings to the full Victoriana. Greater contrast between these and the craggier Spanish Renaissance works and Tallis's brooding *O sacrum convivium* would offer more light and shade, but it's a gorgeous, eminently listenable disc. And, judging by booklet credits to babysitters, the next generation of Bevans is already under construction: watch this musical space.

Alexandra Coghlan

ONLINE CONCERTS & EVENTS

Charlotte Gardner explores a range of web-based concerts

Concertos across the continent

One can't help but wonder whether Dutch violinist **Liza Ferschtman** has a Brahms Violin Concerto release up her sleeve for some point in the not too distant future, as it has been such a feature of her current season. If ever she has, and if her April performance on medici.tv with the Orchestre Philharmonique Royal de Liège and Gergely Madaras is anything to go by, it should be well worth a listen.

Things already feel good over the orchestral introduction, Madaras taking it with bright-toned noble grandeur, subtly crisp articulation and leisurely lilt, on to which Ferschtman launches up her initial ascent with crisply delineated, bridge-rattling muscle. What then follows is a spacious, broadly conceived, flexible first movement flitting between slowed, time-suspended softer sections and momentum-filled climaxes, with Ferschtman herself happy on occasion to sacrifice tonal beauty for gritty power, but also bringing immense legato sweetness – albeit still with a strong backbone – to her more tender lines. Cadenza-wise, she's gone for the Kreisler (see my Collection on page 100), which comes increasingly luxuriously paced and dramatically weighted as it nears its conclusion.

The other prominent quality is everyone's pleasure-filled chamber awareness, all beautifully captured by the medici.tv cameras, Ferschtman swivelling around to engage with the orchestra, and its clearly-having-a-blast musicians responding in kind. Further hallmark qualities include, in the *Adagio*, Ferschtman changing the soloist's notation in bar 53 – is this a return to some previous version or a personal touch? – and the weightily resplendent oomph of each of the finale theme's off-beat *sforzando* kicks. For an encore, Ferschtman then nods to Brahms's love of Bach via the *Andante* from the latter's Solo Violin Sonata in A minor, softly rubato'd and embellished. The concert's harmonious pairings don't stop there, because for the second half Madaras picks up the Hungarian thread with a rare outing for Dohnányi's *Ruralia hungarica*, Op 32*b* – a sequence of five Hungarian Transylvanian folk-song arrangements – and a firecracker of a reading.

Head next to the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra's GSOPlay and you'll find Pekka Kuusisto conducting the GSO and young Swedish violinist **Ava Bahari** – a former Kolja Blacher pupil whose recent international competition successes include fourth at the 2021 Tibor Varga – in the far lesser-spotted Violin Concerto completed in 1936 by Brahms-loving Arnold Schoenberg.

> Timothy Chooi is tailor-made for Bruch's panache-filled romanticism and he's clearly in his comfort zone

When you have the opportunity to watch as well as hear this work, it's impossible not to sympathise afresh with musicians' initial (or continued) unwillingness to take this one on. Beyond its 12-note language and sheer technical difficulty, there's the challenge of pulling its complex polyphonic strings into a tight, single argument of superglued chamber interplay. So clearly it's a boon here to have on the GSO podium a violinist-conductor known for his championing of contemporary music, and the end result is lucid, energetic, tightly responsive ensemble playing that radiates the sense of everyone being on their toes, listening for their lives.

Bahari meanwhile appears fearless. Standing poised and erect – no wide, flamboyant body language from her, it's all going into her clean, richly steely sound – and equally alert to her surroundings, she delivers a deftly shaped, lyrical reading, while dispatching even the most technically ferocious lines with phenomenal technical polish – listen to the evenly weighted sheen of her double-stopped passages, the strong-voiced purity of her harmonics and the plump richness of her left-hand pizzicato in the cadenza. Between her and the GSO, the whole adds up to an interpretation satisfyingly honouring both the work's neoclassical character and its underlying romanticism.

The only moment at which Bahari betrays what a feat it has felt like to deliver such a cast-iron performance comes right at the very end, a split second after her bow has stopped for the final time, when rather than holding her pose for a few further moments of atmosphere-laden stillness, she instead instantly drops the violin out from under her chin and into her wrist, with an audible clunk and a look of relief-flecked pride that says, 'There'. Poetic it is not. But it rather suits the piece. Plus there's a further treat, because she meets the standing ovation with a tremendous performance of the *Recitativo and Scherzo-caprice* by Schoenberg's fellow US-based Austrian émigré Fritz Kreisler, delivering its own virtuosity-laden blend of Bach-breathed counterpoint and 19th-century romanticism at a roaring, sparkling, bow-flying pace.

To bring the violin concerto tradition right up to the present day, arte.tv has the late-April world premiere of a first contribution to the genre by one of France's rising star composers, Camille Pépin, performed at the Paris Philharmonie by its dedicatee, **Renaud Capuçon**, with the Orchestre National de France under the baton of Simone Young; and if you're already familiar with Pépin's distinctive musical language – tonal, clearly influenced by American minimalism but equally audibly carrying some Debussy in its DNA – then know that *Le sommeil à pris ton empreinte* ('Sleep has taken hold of you') very much fits that mould. Lasting just over 20 minutes, its five sections are inspired by three poems by Paul Éluard,

Swedish violinist Ava Bahari is fearless in Schoenberg's Violin Concerto, delivering a deftly shaped and lyrical reading

and it opens sounding thoroughly tone-poem-esque: eerily cloaked and quiet, all the focus on Capuçon's *sul tasto* violin as it counterpoints a long-breathed, searching upper line with lower, roughly whispered tremolo, the harp sporadically doubling in close communion, slowly joined by further orchestral comment, all underpinned by a dramatically taut pedal point. Gradually the violin figures – simultaneously repetitive and in a constant state of subtle evolution – grow in tense urgency and volume. The orchestra equally builds in volume, strength, colour and textural complexity. Onwards, and it's a tension-imbued story of great swirling swells of increasingly pentatonic-coloured sound which rise, subside and rise again. Stasis contrasts with movement, rough-edged rushing figures with glassier floating. For the soloist, beyond the speed and relentlessness of much of its figuration, there are the multiple timbres, articulation types and simultaneously singing voices to realise, many of them perfect vehicles for Capuçon's velvety beauty and dispatched by him as such over a clearly emotionally committed performance, until, finally, the music subsides into its final whisper. All in all, it's a thoroughly likeable work that, if it were a painting, would be a vast, sweeping Oriental landscape. And it couldn't feel more appropriate for Young to follow it with Mahler's First Symphony, with its own awakening of nature into some primeval dawn.

For an entirely different sort of violin-shaped first, young Canadian-American violinist **Timothy Chooi** made his debut back in January with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra in a well-received performance of Bruch's *Brigadoon*-esque *Scottish Fantasy*, conducted by Domingo Hindoyan and now on medici.tv. Anyone who caught Chooi's first-prize-winning Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto at the 2018 Joseph Joachim International Violin Competition – full of polished showmanship and bravura body language – will know how tailor-made he is for Bruch's own panache-filled romanticism; and indeed he's clearly in his comfort zone on the Liverpool stage, making full use of its dreamlike opening's potential to platform his considerable tonal beauty and capacity for dramatic poetic intensity, then into an impassioned, satiny-singing performance dispatched with more action-man posture, often with a half-smile at his lips. There's equal poetry and romance from the orchestra, along with satisfyingly crisp Scotch snaps for the finale. Plus, with no encore from Chooi, it gets to build straight on the Bruch with an equally poetic, satisfyingly sculpted Bruckner Symphony No 4.

Those who fancy a more Baroque-flavoured fairy-tale world might want to also hop to Marquee TV, where a mention-worthy recent addition is the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment's collaboration last October with actor Rory Kinnear at London's Queen Elizabeth Hall, Kinnear reading Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, interspersed with Purcell's music for the stage – an end-to-end gem of atmosphere-laden, intelligent curation, vibrant orchestral playing and grippingly articulated spoken verse. What could be more perfect, for instance, than to follow the Mariner's shooting of the albatross with Purcell's overture to the revenge tragedy *Abdelazer*? The OAE really do seem like incidental players in a Restoration-era theatre, too, as Kinnear walks between them during their musical interludes, not dropping out of character for a second but instead turning them into his wildlife-teeming sea. So while it's the least recent among this month's selections, you also couldn't hope for a more perfect, palate-cleansing climax. G

THE EVENTS

Brahms Vn Conc **Dohnányi** Ruralia hungarica
Ferschtman; Liège RPO / Madaras
medici.tv

Schoenberg Vn Conc
Bahari; Gothenburg SO / P Kuusisto
gso.se/en

Pépin Vn Conc **Mahler** Sym No 1
R Capuçon; Orch Nat de France / Young
arte.tv

Bruch Scottish Fantasy **Bruckner** Sym No 4
Chooi; RLPO / Hindoyan medici.tv

Purcell The Rime of the Ancient Mariner
Kinnear; OAE marquee.tv

Opera

Neil Fisher reads Tarantino into Barrie Kosky's Amsterdam Tosca:

'The realism sucks us into the horror, and Malin Byström responds to every fresh disaster with haunting plausibility' ▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 83

Richard Lawrence admires Adèle Charvet in a Venetian programme:

'Whatever the mood – vigorous, impassioned or wistful – Charvet catches it perfectly' ▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 84

Engel

Grete Minde

Marko Pantelić *bar* ..... Gerdt Minde
Kristi Anna Isene *sop* ..... Trud Minde
Jan Arik Redmer *sngr* ..... Little Gerdt
Raffaela Lintl *sop* ..... Grete Minde
Jadwiga Postrożna *mez* ..... Emrentz Zernitz
Zoltán Nyári *ten* ..... Valtin
Paul Sketris *bass* ..... Old Gigas
Johannes Stermann *bass* ..... Peter Guntz
Johannes Wollrab *bar* ..... Puppeteer
Benjamin Lee *ten* ..... Hanswurst
Na'ama Shulman *sop* ..... Zenobia
Karina Repova *mez* ..... Mother Superior
Frank Heinrich *sngr* ..... Innkeeper
Chorus of Theater Magdeburg; Magdeburg Philharmonic Orchestra / Anna Skryleva
Orfeo (C260352 ② • 112')
Recorded live, February 13, 2022
Includes synopsis, libretto and translation

Who, you might be forgiven for asking, was Eugen Engel (1875-1943)? As Orfeo's excellent booklet explains, he was a Berlin-based businessman trading 'ladies' coat fabrics and ready-to-wear fabrics'. His lifelong passion was music, however, and he was well connected in the Berlin music scene in the first decades of the 20th century, before the rise of the Nazis forced him into exile in Holland. He was deported and murdered in the Sobibor extermination camp in March 1943.

Indeed, almost his entire family was murdered by the Nazis. But his daughter got away, to the United States, carrying with her a suitcase crammed with her father's manuscripts, which remained untouched until after her death in 2006. One of the scores it contained was for Engel's opera *Grete Minde*, on which he worked from 1914 until that fateful year of 1933. The production of the work at Theater Magdeburg in early 2022, as captured on this release, was the first time it was heard.

It is based on Theodor Fontane's short story of the same name, which was converted into a libretto by the journalist and part-time librettist – and, after 1933, enthusiastic Nazi – Hans Bodenstedt. The story tells of free-spirited Grete Minde, who elopes with her lover Valtin to escape the joyless household of her commandeering half-sister Trud in Tangermünde (some 40 miles up the Elbe from Magdeburg).

They get as far as Arendsee (about another 40 miles upriver), where three years later Valtin dies, not before entreating Grete, now mother to a young child, to return home to ask for forgiveness or, if that fails, her inheritance. When she arrives back, however, she is mocked and rejected and, in her desperation, sets the town alight before climbing the church tower, where she and her child perish as the shocked townspeople look on.

It's certainly a dramatic subject, and Engel sets it with skill and a certain amount of imagination. The booklet suggests a musical language rooted in the tradition of Wagner, Korngold and Strauss, but despite sprinklings of glockenspiel and some adventurous harmonies, the basis seems to me much of the time closer to Weber. The opening scene's arrival of the Puppeteer (otherwise a somewhat superfluous element in the drama) is reminiscent of *Pagliacci*.

As is perhaps to be expected, then, Engel's musical language is derivative, but he's still a highly skilled composer and the score has some attractive moments – the end of Act 2 builds up some tragic weight, for example, while the incorporation of church music in Act 3 is also highly effective. And the drama itself leaves an impression, even if there's little in the music that's truly memorable. A rediscovered masterpiece? No, but a fascinating record of an entirely forgotten composer.

This is likely to remain the work's only recording, and happily the Magdeburg forces, persuasively conducted by Anna Skryleva, do it proud. It's a fine achievement from an ensemble cast, with Raffaela Lintl's Grete a vivid, believable creation, and Zoltán Nyári an attractively sung Valtin. Kristi Anna Isene and Marko Pantelić are suitably unflinching as Trud and her husband, Gerdt. Among the other singers, Karina Repova stands out for her powerful and affecting Mother Superior.

Hugo Shirley

Mercadante

Il proscritto

Ramón Vargas *ten* ..... Giorgio Argyll
Iván Ayón-Rivas *ten* ..... Arturo Murray
Sally Matthews *sop* ..... Anna Ruthven
Goderdzi Janelidze *bass* ..... Guglielmo Ruthven
Elizabeth DeShong *mez* ..... Odoardo Douglas
Irene Roberts *mez* ..... Malvina Douglas
Susana Gaspar *sop* ..... Clara
Alessandro Fisher *ten* ..... Osvaldo
Niall Anderson *bass-bar* ..... Officer of Cromwell
Opera Rara Chorus; Britten Sinfonia / Carlo Rizzi
Opera Rara (ORC62 ② • 124')
Includes synopsis, libretto and translation

Mercadante's *Il proscritto* was first performed in Naples, in 1842. Dividing opinion at the time (Mercadante was accused of being too Germanic in the press), it was never revived in his lifetime and remained in limbo until 2019, when Opera Rara's artistic director, Carlo Rizzi, unearthed the autograph score in the archives of the Naples Conservatory. That in turn paved the way for a critical edition by Roger Parker and Ian Schofield, which formed the basis both of a concert performance at London's Barbican in 2022 and this recording made in tandem with it.

Its source was *Le proscrit*, a popular 1839 melodrama by Frédéric Soulié and Timothée Dehay that had already been the subject of an 1841 opera by Otto Nicolai. Anxious to avoid censorship troubles, however, Mercadante's librettist, Salvadore Cammarano, relocated the action from Grenoble after the Napoleonic wars

to Edinburgh under Cromwell's protectorate. The outlaw ('proscritto') of the title is the royalist Giorgio Argyll, long believed to have drowned in a shipwreck, who returns home in secret only to find that his 'widow' Malvina has just married the Cromwellian Arturo, ostensibly under family pressure, but also, we soon realise, out of genuine love, thereby setting in motion a conflict that eventually drives her to suicide. There are flaws of shape. Malvina's family, dominated by her manipulative mother Anna and fanatical half-brother Guglielmo, is too sketchily drawn, while her younger brother Odoardo, played by a mezzo, is occasionally allotted a musical importance not always supported by the narrative, which in turn can impede the dramatic momentum.

The score is an at times unsteady amalgam of *bel canto* tradition and Mercadante's so-called 'reform' style of the late 1830s, in which, under the influence of Meyerbeer, he attempted to push against the boundaries of formal convention and give his orchestra greater prominence. In *Il proscritto*, we consequently find set display pieces wedged against extended scenes in which arias, arioso and ensembles flow together linked by bridging passages of considerable subtlety. Odoardo, conventionally heroic, gets a grand coloratura showstopper while Giorgio and Arturo, both tenors, wrangle proprietorially over Malvina in a bravura duet in the Rossini mould. Malvina, the victim of so much male aggression, has no aria of her own, however, but is presented in constant relation to the other characters through a sequence of fluidly beautiful duets and ensembles.

Rizzi by and large makes a strong case for it, conducting with care and considerable verve throughout, and, with the Britten Sinfonia on fine form, places due emphasis on Mercadante's striking orchestration, all oily clarinets, melancholy horns and churning strings. As Giorgio, Ramón Vargas, mature-sounding and slightly gritty in tone, broods, obsesses and threatens magnificently, while Iván Ayón-Rivas's Arturo in contrast is altogether more youthful and elegant in his bewilderment, despair and passion. Their big confrontation is spectacularly good, as is Elizabeth DeShong in Odoardo's aria, thrillingly sung and admirably secure over a massive vocal range. Irene Roberts's Malvina, however, is less successful: the voice is warm and beautiful but a disengaged quality to her singing means that the heroine's emotional agony doesn't always register as it should. Sally Matthews, luxury casting as Anna, could do more with the words, though Goderdzi Janelidze is nicely implacable as Guglielmo. The choral singing is first-rate. Both work and performance have their flaws, in short, but this is an often fascinating set nevertheless.

Tim Ashley

Puccini

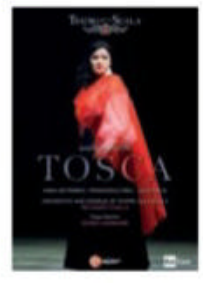
Tosca

Anna Netrebko *sop* ..... Tosca
Francesco Meli *ten* ..... Cavaradossi
Luca Salsi *bar* ..... Scarpia
Carlo Cigni *bass* ..... Angelotti
Alfonso Antoniozzi *bar* ..... Sacristan
Carlo Bosi *ten* ..... Spoletta
Giulio Mastrototaro *bar* ..... Sciarrone
Ernesto Panariello *bass* ..... Gaoler
Chorus and Orchestra of the Teatro alla Scala, Milan / Riccardo Chailly
Stage director **Davide Livermore**
Video director **Patrizia Carmine**
C Major Entertainment (763308 DVD; 763404 Blu-ray • 145')
Recorded live at La Scala, Milan, 2019
Includes synopsis

Puccini

Tosca

Malin Byström *sop* ..... Tosca
Joshua Guerrero *ten* ..... Cavaradossi
Gevorg Hakobyan *bar* ..... Scarpia
Martijn Sanders *bar* ..... Angelotti
Federico De Michelis *bass-bar* ..... Sacristan
Lucas van Lierop *ten* ..... Spoletta
Maksym Nazarenko *bar* ..... Sciarrone
Alexander de Jong *bar* ..... Gaoler
Chorus of Dutch National Opera; Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra / Lorenzo Viotti
Stage director **Barrie Kosky**
Video director **François Roussillon**
Naxos (2 110752 DVD; NBD0166V Blu-ray • 125')
Recorded live, May 3 & 6, 2022
Includes synopsis



Two *Toscas*, two very different shows – and two valuable records of projects giving Puccini a spring clean. In Milan, La Scala music director Riccardo Chailly began his tenure promising a fresh focus on core Italian repertoire. In Puccini, that has meant championing original versions of the scores, notably the 1904 *Madama Butterfly* (3/19) and, recorded here, a new Ricordi edition of *Tosca* opening up cuts Puccini made after the 1900 premiere. In Amsterdam, Dutch National Opera's young chief conductor Lorenzo Viotti has teamed up with iconoclastic director Barrie Kosky for a mini Puccini cycle. An acclaimed *Turandot* followed this 2022 *Tosca*, and *Il trittico* is still to come.

Poles apart as the stagings are – it's tempting to call Kosky's stark Dutch staging the Protestant riposte to the Catholic excess shown by director Davide Livermore in Milan – both are connected through allusions to cinema. Kosky cites film noir as an inspiration: not in the contemporary look of his production, minimally designed by Rufus Didwiszus, but in the bleakness of his approach and the tautness of his dramaturgy. Livermore's hyperactive staging tries to ape the fluidity of a movie camera. The stage revolves, rises and falls as backdrops and settings glide on and off (monumental period designs by Giò Forma). A giant digitised portrait of Cavaradossi's model, the Marchesa Attavanti, forms out of pixels, then goes from monochrome to colour when Cavaradossi activates it with a touch of his hand.

Both directors are drawing on Puccini's proto-Hollywood instincts but Livermore does it with such self-conscious excess that it becomes a barrier. Bafflingly, the La Scala DVD also includes extended audience applause at the start of the 2019 *prima* performance for the great and the good in the royal box, a rendition of Italy's national anthem and the curtain calls after Acts 1 and 2. Perhaps this is subtle commentary that Tosca is living in her own opera, but I doubt it.

Supporting and boosting Livermore's overall approach, however, is Chailly, who paints the score in oils worthy of a Renaissance master. The flavours are rich and heavy, the tempos languorous (not always helpful for the singers), and the drama less frenetic than inexorable. There is nothing in the 1900 Urtext to scare the horses – the only addition that really startles is a slightly extended ending after Tosca realises her lover has been killed, making for less of a wham-bam finale than the usual brutal coda. The other alterations are curios for the completist to savour.

Kosky and Viotto, as closely allied in style, find fresh, sometimes truly shocking energy. Viotto favours lithe tempos and more transparent textures, the excellent Dutch strings sweet and bubbly in the first act's comings and goings, then almost raw and guttural during Cavaradossi's ordeal in Act 2. Kosky

banishes almost all the usual rites of a *Tosca* staging – red velvet gowns, candles and castle battlements – but this must be one of the bloodiest *Toscas* shown on stage, in a world where the characters' Christian faith is clearly a personal defence against the horror of the tyranny under which they live.

In Kosky's production, Joshua Guerrero's grungy, workaday painter Cavaradossi first appears spattered in paint – grimly echoed when in the cellar of Scarpia's anonymous kitchen (this 'baron' is a dab hand at slicing his own sashimi) he suffers horrific torture and the red stuff flows liberally. The murder of Gevorg Hakobyan's thuggish Scarpia is just as Tarantinoesque – it contrasts, again in Kosky's favour, with the perfunctory knifing in Milan, which veers to the risible as a filmed close-up. Still, Luca Salsi's smoother, seductively voiced Scarpia in Milan is, by a whisker, preferable to Hakobyan's more forthright performance.

And the leading ladies? In Milan, Anna Netrebko is in imperious voice as Tosca, with her darkly tannic lower register especially forceful, and a 'Vissi d'arte' delivered with lashings of buttery tone. Her heroine, however, is cast in the usual, rather hackneyed mould of a proud if insecure diva, and her relationship with Francesco Meli's Cavaradossi (heroic in tone, making the most of his big moments) is sketchily portrayed. The relationship Kosky charts between Guerrero's subtler sung painter and Malin Byström's compelling Tosca is brilliantly detailed, to a large part thanks to the sincerity of Byström's approach, essentially playing the kind of talented, charismatic soprano regularly profiled in the pages of this magazine. The realism of the approach allows us to get sucked into the horror, and as the screw is turned Byström responds to every fresh disaster with haunting plausibility. Skilfully filmed (no curtain calls breaking in here) and exuding the confidence of a true ensemble show, the Dutch *Tosca* makes the punchier package.

Neil Fisher

Spontini

La Vestale

Marina Rebeka *sop* ..... Julia
Stanislas de Barbeyrac *ten* ..... Licinius
Tassis Christoyannis *bar* ..... Cinna
Aude Extrémo *mez* ..... La Grande Vestale
Nicolas Courjal *bass* ..... Pontifex Maximus
David Witczak *bar* ..... Consul/Chief Soothsayer
Flemish Radio Choir; Les Talens Lyriques / Christophe Rousset

Bru Zane (BZ1051 ② • 132')
Includes synopsis, libretto and translation

Following *Olimpie* (7/19), this is Bru Zane's second recording of an opera by Spontini. *La Vestale* reached the stage of the Paris Opéra on December 15, 1807, largely due to the intervention of the composer's patron, the empress Josephine. It was Spontini's first great success; and, according to *Grove*, 100 performances were given at the Opéra over the next 10 years. Julia and the Souverain Pontife (the Pontifex Maximus) were sung by Caroline Branchu and Henri-Étienne Dérivis, both of whom went on to appear in Spontini's *Fernand Cortez* and *Olimpie* as well as Cherubini's *Les Abencérages* (1/23).

The action opens in the Roman Forum. Licinius, the general who has repelled an invasion by the Gauls, is to receive the victor's crown from Julia, the Vestal Virgin in charge of the sacred fire. The two had fallen in love years before but, while Licinius was seeking glory on campaign, Julia was forced to become a Vestal. At dead of night, in the Temple of Vesta, they are about to plight their troth at the altar before fleeing. Suddenly the fire goes out; Licinius escapes, but Julia, confessing her love to the Pontiff, is condemned to death. In the Field of Execration, Julia is about to be entombed when Licinius bursts in, offering himself as the sacrifice. There is a flash of lightning, and the sacred fire is rekindled. The Pontiff recognises that the goddess Vesta has forgiven the outrage. Julia is released from her vows and the lovers are united.

Spontini cloaks this simple story – to be echoed in later operas, Bellini's *Norma* being but one example – with music of remarkable power. One's attention is seized from the outset, the Overture's solemn introduction leading to a nervy *Allegro* with Beethovenian *sforzandos*. What follows is a sequence of airs, accompanied recitatives, ensembles, hymns and processions, ending – this being a French opera – with a *danse générale*. In some instances, such as the duet between Licinius and the Pontiff, dramatic impetus is maintained by the music moving on without a break. The orchestration is wonderfully rich, and Les Talens Lyriques are terrific. Delicate woodwind, a splendid rasp to the trombones, and the horns – four of them – whoop away in fanfares. A special mention for Jeroen Billiet, who tops and tails the first air in Julia's great Act 2 scena with a solo containing a hair-raising number of stopped notes: think of the 'Quoniam' in Bach's B minor Mass played on a natural horn and you will get the idea.

Marina Rebeka is magnificent as Julia. As recorded, she can sound shrill – her slow-fast air in Act 1 being an example – but that is nothing compared to her wholehearted commitment to the drama. The first air in the scena already mentioned is followed by a Gluckian accompanied recitative, grippingly delivered; this leads in turn to 'Impitoyables dieux', a C minor outburst that recalls – fortuitously, I imagine – Elettra's hysterical exit in Mozart's *Idomeneo*. Licinius begins the opera with an apostrophe to Night: Stanislas de Barbeyrac sounds too beefy for the situation, not helped by a rather forward recording; such prominence is more suitable when he addresses the crowd in the Forum. His gentle air, 'Les dieux prendront pitié', and the rapturous, breathless duet with Julia find him – Rebeka, too – on top form.

The relationship between Licinius and Cinna calls to mind the friendship between Orestes and Pylades in Gluck's *Iphigénie en Tauride*. Tassis Christoyannis is eloquent in 'Dans le sein d'un ami fidèle', the lines lovingly phrased. Aude Extrémo and Nicolas Courjal, both deep-toned, are fearsome as the Chief Vestal and the Pontiff. The 36-strong Flemish Radio Choir sing fervently in the large ensembles, and the Vestals' hymns, Morning and Evening, are done with great tenderness. Christophe Rousset's direction deserves the highest praise. Apart from a misattributed line on page 120 of the libretto, the presentation is well up to Bru Zane's usual standard. Do not miss this riveting performance.

Richard Lawrence

'Teatro Sant'Angelo'

Chelleri Amalasunta – Astri aversi; La navicella. Trio Sonata in G minor – Adagio **M Gasparini** Rodomonte sdegnato – Il mio crudele amor **Porta** Arie nove dà batello – Patrona reverita **Ristori** Arianna – Nell'onda chiara. Cleonice – Con favella de' pianti; Qual crudo vivere; Quel pianto che vedi. Un pazzo ne fa cento ovvero Don Chisciotte – Su robusti. Temistocle – Aspri rimorsi **Vivaldi** Andromeda liberata – Sovvente il sole. Arsilda, regina di Ponto – Ah non so, se quel ch'io sento. L'incoronazione di Dario – Quella bianca e tenerina. L'olimpiade – Siam navi. La verità in cimento – Con più diletto; Tu m'offendi

Gevorg Hakobyan (left) as a thuggish Scarpia and Malin Byström charismatic as Tosca in Barrie Kosky's staging from Dutch National Opera – see review on page 83

PHOTOGRAPHY: MARCO BORGGREVE

Adèle Charvet *mez*
Le Consort / Théotime Langlois de Swarte *vn*
Alpha (ALPHA938 • 66')
Includes texts and translations

The Teatro Sant'Angelo was the principal theatre in Venice with which Vivaldi was associated, as both composer and manager. It saw the premieres of some 20 of his operas and *pasticcios*, from *Orlando finto pazzo* (1713) to *Feraspe* (1739). Overlooking the Grand Canal, the theatre opened in 1677. It closed in 1804 and was eventually demolished. The Palazzo Barocci, now a hotel, stands on the site.

All the true operas by Vivaldi featured here – *Andromeda liberata* is a serenata – were first staged at the Sant'Angelo, as were those by Gasparini and Chelleri. It is typical of the inadequacies of the booklet that no information is given on the operas by Ristori – *Temistocle* was staged in Naples, the other three in or near Dresden – nor indeed on Michelangelo Gasparini, who was possibly the brother of the better known Francesco. Giovanni Alberto Ristori (1692-1753) is a real find. 'Con favella de' pianti', the first excerpt from *Cleonice*, starts with soft, slow repeated chords in the strings, as though the composer had been listening to the Cold Genius in Purcell's *King Arthur*; while the remorse of 'Aspri rimorsi' from *Temistocle* is illustrated by dragging suspensions in the oboes. Fortunato Chelleri (*c*1690-1757), born to a German father, is worth a listen, as well; the accompaniment to 'La navicella che scorge il lido' illustrates the waves of the metaphor, with descending chromatics for the swallow finding the safety of her nest. As for Gasparini (*c*1670-*c*1732), 'Il mio crudele amor' is a gentle siciliana, the violins in thirds and sixths belying the sentiments (about a lover rather than 'love', surely) of the verse.

The first of the Vivaldi numbers is 'Siam navi all'onde algenti' – ships at sea, as so often in *opera seria*. Here Adèle Charvet has nothing to fear from Cecilia Bartoli on her 'The Vivaldi Album' (Decca, 12/99): both singers brilliant in the triplet runs, Charvet's performance enhanced by a vivid, almost violent accompaniment. In the excerpt from *Andromeda liberata* she is up against the smoky-toned Max Emanuel Cencic on the complete recording (Archiv, 1/05). It's a slow piece, with a prominent solo violin part (beautifully played): the way Charvet intensifies her tone as she sustains a note across the bar line is admirable. Whatever the mood – vigorous, impassioned or wistful – Charvet catches it perfectly. And there's a perfect end to the disc: a simple, strophic aria by Giovanni Porta – not from an opera – accompanied only by a theorbo.

The orchestra under Théotime Langlois de Swarte is excellent. I referred above to the booklet. Not only does it fail to indicate the name of the character singing, it doesn't even tell you his or her sex. (At least two arias were written for a castrato.) The translator, clearly working from the French rather than the original Italian, has (rather charmingly) mistaken 'pleurs' for 'fleurs', so we get 'in the language of the flowers' rather than 'of tears'. Still, nobody buys a recording for its booklet. This is an enjoyable exploration of byways. **Richard Lawrence**

The Editors of Gramophone's sister music magazines, Jazzwise, Songlines and Musicals, recommend some of their favourite recordings from the past month

Jazz

Brought to you by jazzwise

Joe Lovano Trio Tapestry

Our Daily Bread

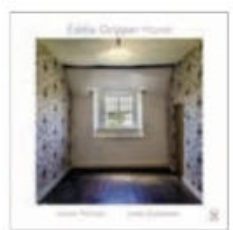
ECM 2777

Jazz fans need no introduction to US saxophonist Joe Lovano and his partners in Trio Tapestry, but classical listeners who found things harder to love after the emergence of serialism and 12-tone forms might get a change of heart from this innovative ensemble. Lovano, multifaceted improv/contemporary classical pianist Marilyn Crispell and subtle percussionist Carmen Castaldi, have been exploring a rich landscape of tone rows, ballad and blues phrasing, and glimpses of jazz grooves since 2018. *Our Daily Bread* takes the process enchantingly on, with the title of the opening 'All Twelve' making the structural source plain, but its development is a quietly gripping transition from Crispell's steadily climbing note patterns, through their slow absorption into harmonies – eventually shadowed by Castaldi's mallets – and then supportive dissolution into Lovano's tenor buzzes, purrs, and hints at grooves. Among other tracks, 'Le Petit Opportun' highlights the leader's tenor-ballad lyricism, 'The Power Of Three' is a dreamily compelling collective improv, and 'Crystal Ball' a closing ensemble celebration of this unique outfit's uncanny empathy. **John Fordham**

Eddie Gripper

Home

Ubuntu Music UBU0133



The UK has produced some extraordinary jazz pianists of late. Still only 22, Eddie Gripper began to study jazz in 2019, with Huw Warren. 2019: let that sink in. And now here he is already with his own debut piano trio album. The tunes are all originals, often meditative in character, with a distinctively cool, airy quality, reminiscent of Marcin Wasilewski. Gripper's classical training is obvious in the evenness and restraint of his playing, sympathetically complemented by bassist Ursula Harrison and drummer Isaac Zuckerman, so that between them they impart a pleasing, stripped down quality to the music. At the same time, the arrangements are fully thought through, the improvised passages alternating with written sub-sections. While always melodic, Gripper's melodies are not the kind that instantly lodge in the memory; rather, he sends out long, tendril-like lines of melody that take their time to explore and evolve. In its maturity of approach and deftness of execution, *Home* is a significant achievement by any standards. **Peter Jones**

World Music

Brought to you by SONGLINES

PJEV, Kit Downes & Hayden Chisholm

Medna Roso

Red Hook Records

This is the kind of inter-cultural collaboration I can get into. Too often, such projects are the mooncalves of questions like 'what would happen if we crossed klezmer with samba?' The act of simply putting one thing with another, unless skilfully done, can seem too blunt a juxtaposition; like a pilchard meringue. The constituent parts of *Medna Roso*, however, meld so organically that, rather than appearing as cameos in each other's narratives, they give birth to something entirely new and independent of its parents. That isn't to say that there aren't echoes of older sounds here. Indeed, the wellspring of the album is the traditional Balkan repertoire of female vocal quintet PJEV, with layers of Kit Downes' pipe organ and infusions of Hayden Chisholm's sax which brings to mind Jan Garbarek's work with the Hilliard Ensemble. Fans of any of these things, as well as Le Mystère des Voix Bulgares, overtone singing and raw primal tonalities will find nourishment here. When you then realise that this album is actually a live concert, your mind will be truly blown. **Tom Newell**

Seckou Keita

African Rhapsodies

Claves Records

Senegalese kora player Seckou Keita has been on a mission to expand the sound of the instrument, having already been part of countless cross-genre collaborations, including with harpist Catrin Finch. Here he branches out yet again, this time placing the kora at the heart of a full orchestra, in this case the BBC Concert Orchestra. Across the ten tracks here, we are treated to some familiar tunes. 'Future Strings' opens the album with a cinematic sweep, the kora not even appearing until over a minute and a half in. The orchestration, made with composer Davide Mantovani, is gorgeous and full. Seckou's positivity is still palpable in the songs, even as they gain more heft with the orchestra. 'Simply Beautiful Miro' is comforting and warm, supported by the unmistakable voice and cello of Abel Selaocoe. And closer 'Bamba, The Light of Touba', which 'invites us to follow a spiritual path … to work for peace and to always come back to what matters the most, love,' is appropriately joyful and light. **Alexandra Petropoulos**

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Musical Theatre

Brought to you by MUSICALS

Rodgers and Hammerstein: South Pacific

First complete recording

National SO / John Owen Edwards

JAY Records

JAY Records' First Complete Recording of *South Pacific* in 1997 featured twice as much music as the Original Cast Recording. That's one reason why its return to disc is welcome. Goodbye highlights, hello the real deal with reprises and all the superbly atmospheric underscoring.

The other reason? Robert Russell Bennett, who plays with the 30-piece band to wonderfully lush and illustrative effect. The supreme asset of this new digital remix is having all that detail given real warmth in a spacious acoustic as conductor John Owen Edwards leads the orchestra through Bennett's beautifully evocative work with lustre and heft.

Perky Paige O'Hara is certainly nicely 'immature and incurably green', although her Nellie lacks relaxed warmth. As Emile, Justino Diaz sings with richness but, faced with the climactic, epic lament 'This Nearly Was Mine', he simply cannot touch the focused passion of the original Ezio Pinza.

The company numbers are done with gusto and Pat Suzuki lends Mary both low cunning and welcome restraint. But although Sean McDermott has the range and experience for Cable, he lacks true ardour in 'Younger Than Springtime'.

So, this carefully crafted, often nicely boisterous recording is strong enough for anyone wanting the full score. But the true passion driving *South Pacific* is only glimpsed. **David Benedict**

Brown & Uhry: Parade

2023 Broadway Cast Recording / Jason Robert Brown

Interscope Records

The Original Broadway Cast recording of this remarkable show is one of the great cast albums. For one thing, it enshrined a historic debut for 28-year-old composer/lyricist Jason Robert Brown. But here we are again 25 years later. The 1998 album was widescreen in every sense but with an affecting intimacy behind the closed doors of Leo and Lucille Frank's marriage. The focus is tighter in 2023, but paradoxically not all the detail in Don Sebesky's orchestrations hit home as they did so electrifyingly in the original.

The wonder of Brown's score is its breathtaking confidence, running the gamut of musical Americana. Lucille's withering 'You Don't Know This Man' does in two minutes what it takes other shows entire scores to convey. Micaela Diamond is well-matched to the intensity and vulnerability conveyed through Ben Platt's rapid and emotive vibrato. My own judgement here won't in the slightest influence those who want a souvenir of this revival, but I am bound to say that the original Leo (Brent Carver) and Lucille (Carolee Carmello) take us by the throat on the 1998 album in ways that recordings of great performances rarely do. Then again, you might love this new version so much that you'll want both. **Edward Seckerson**

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REISSUES & ARCHIVE

Our monthly guide to the most exciting catalogue releases, historic issues and box-sets

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Remembering Bernard Haitink

Peter Quantrill delves into a set collecting the Dutch conductor's studio recordings

When we speak about others we often say more about ourselves. 'Haydn is terribly underrated,' remarked Bernard Haitink in 1976. 'He's not as simple as some think. He may even be more complicated because the emotions are hidden beneath a Classical surface. But behind the surface there's so much going on.'

Record-company tactics deprived us of the opportunity to hear much of the conductor making good on his words; at this point, Philips had already begun recording their Concertgebouw Haydn series with Colin Davis. A single LP of Symphonies Nos 96 and 99 gives us a taste of what we lost, as well as affording a bittersweet reminder of Haitink at his most genial on the concert podium. It's the best of big-band Haydn: rhythmically forthright, more stylishly 18th-century in phrasing than most of his maestro colleagues, and eminently repeatable.

Like many musicians of his era, Haitink hardly listened to records, his own or other people's, and if he did it was to the quartets of Bartók and Beethoven: from one point of view, the epitome of 'abstract' music. Bartók was another under-recorded composer in his discography: the *Dance Suite* from 1961 illustrates the discipline and the feeling for colour he had already instilled in what became for many years 'his' orchestra after the sudden death of Eduard van Beinum in 1959. In his original review (4/62), Jeremy Noble found 'a lack of the electric vitality that Fricsay and Doráti manage to impart to it', articulating what became a refrain for critical reception of Haitink on record.

The Concertgebouw post was initially shared, with Eugen Jochum taking the driving instructor's seat, and Haitink was later typically self-deprecating about his shortcomings as both a leader and a musician in those early years. The main theme of Mendelssohn's *Hebrides* is articulated with painstaking neutrality, and a stiff *Capriccio Italien* lives up to neither of its title's promises. Yet his 1963 Bruckner Third remains my gold standard for the symphony on record. Patience, tension, pulse and forward momentum: all held in ideal balance. The charm and rhythmic grip of a stand-alone Beethoven Eighth from this time compares favourably with the digital-era remake, which includes more of the Concertgebouw acoustic at the expense of inner detail.

> This box is full of suit-and-tie recordings, even if Haitink himself worked up quite a sweat

All these analogue Philips albums were made by the label's chief producer and engineer, Jaap van Ginneken, until his early death in 1972, and their impeccable definition bears his signature as much as that of the conductor. Van Ginneken worked alone, even when balancing the many strands of Mahler's Eighth in what became one of his final recordings, always immaculate in suit and tie behind the deck set up in one of the Concertgebouw's cloakrooms. He and Haitink addressed each other in the formal second-person plural, and they conducted sessions with calm, businesslike efficiency.

This box is full of suit-and-tie recordings, even if Haitink himself worked up quite a sweat. It would be right and just to praise them for their scrupulous musicianship, their structural clarity and civilised moderation. Are these, though, the values we hold dear in the upheavals of Schumann and Tchaikovsky, and symphonic dramas from Beethoven to Shostakovich? Were they ever? Haitink led one memorable evening after another at Glyndebourne and the Royal Opera, and in repertoire from Mozart to Verdi to Tippett, but he was not a creature of the theatre in the traditions of the German Kapellmeisters or Italian maestros. Mood and story come third and fourth to form and line in his occasional operatic outings in the studio such as a Wagnerian bleeding chunks album, and for that matter in his approach to Richard Strauss's tone poems – much more tone than poem.

The same priorities hold good for symphonic composers of decidedly theatrical cast. The Scherzo of the *Little Russian* gets off to a deliciously balletic start – Tchaikovsky at his most Haydnesque – but then the Trio arrives and with it a failure of idiom in the painstaking registration of every subsidiary line. Pairs of Fourths and Sixths are distinguished principally by greater technical mastery of the art of transition in the later versions. A sense of their tragic purpose and the overwhelming necessity for Tchaikovsky to write them remains out of reach. The very early *Storm* overture is a curious but thrilling outlier – a rare instance of orchestra and conductor letting rip in the studio – but no one would turn to Haitink for fireworks, from Handel or anyone else.

The sturdy size of the box belies both the narrow range of repertoire within and Haitink's own, somewhat broader sympathies, an imbalance only partially redressed by his activity with other labels, notably EMI. Such a limitation can hardly be held against him: if no one wanted to record him conducting Mozart or Haydn or Martinů symphonies, the loss is very much ours. Instead, thanks to some nifty licensing work, we have two Beethoven piano concerto cycles (Arrau and Perahia), three Mendelssohn Violin Concertos (Perlman, Grumiaux and Szeryng), four Mahler Fourths and so on.

In 1959 Haitink mused: 'Am I to spend my life playing what every other conductor

Bernard Haitink: a master of expressive restraint and technical finesse

PHOTOGRAPHY: MICHAEL WARD/DECCA

in the world plays?' The half-century of recordings compiled here emphatically answer him in the affirmative. He found himself out of sympathy with the modernists of his era, and turned to Shostakovich as 'the last great symphonist'. Including the LPO portions of the complete cycle is sensible enough, though it also serves to remind collectors that some of Haitink's most exhilarating work on record was done with his 'other' orchestra at the time, such as his first Beethoven symphony cycle.

At the time of their issue in the late '70s and early '80s, the Shostakovich albums gave listeners an intriguingly oblique, outsider's perspective on pieces conceived within Soviet culture and recent, bloody history. Forty years on, with even the agitprop pieces assimilated by orchestras across the world, the suave wind-playing, cultivated attack and studied absence of bombast even in the *Leningrad* have lost their USP. Towards the end of his life, Haitink returned to the Fifteenth, reissued here from the RCO Live series, as one of several 'last thoughts' (along with the Ninths of Bruckner and Mahler) which articulated an attitude of increasingly grim stoicism, both within the works themselves and perhaps towards life in general.

These hallmarks of expressive restraint and technical finesse brought the best out of Haitink in French repertoire. Every phrase of Bizet's Symphony is pointed with neoclassical affection, though without the extrovert flair of Beecham or Toscanini. To search for a 'Haitink style' or even a 'Haitink sound' is to go fishing for a red herring. The only common denominators between his command of Debussy's *Jeux* and the *Adagio* of Bruckner's Eighth are the centred focus of both playing and engineering, and an imperceptible variation of pulse – *cédez un peu* here, *etwas bewegter* there – worthy of Cortot in Chopin or Callas in Verdi, but telepathically shared with 90 others.

When Franz Welser-Möst got his hands on the autograph manuscript of Mahler's Second he said it revealed to him that he must follow the score to the letter. As if it were that simple. Haitink knew, as Welser-Möst does, that it is never that simple. Like his friend and colleague Claudio Abbado, Haitink kept his counsel on this and most other aspects of his craft. When insights came they were the more piercing for their scarcity and brevity, like Confucian epigrams. 'I am very good at translating music with my hands,' he remarked to John Bridcut. Masterclass footage of him coaching young conductors in the Third Symphony of Brahms affords an order of magnitude more enlightenment than thousands of interview words (also more than his own recordings of the symphony). He worked by Solti's maxim: 'If a conductor is clear in his gestures he doesn't really need words.'

The presentation of the box is worthy of its subject, with recordings organised in approximate work chronology, and an illustrated book featuring a preface by the conductor's widow Patricia, a fine essay by Niek Nelissen and a useful list of the recordings in chronological order. My reservations are coloured by memories of Haitink in the flesh. The usual distinction of concert against studio performance hardly applies, demonstrated by a live Beethoven Ninth from 1980 and its 1987 studio counterpart, as well as the late RCO Live concerts; all convincing on their own terms but holding the pieces at arm's length from the listener.

What made the difference was being in the room, where Haitink's functional body language and piercing eyes might have been addressed to the musicians but exercised no less magnetic a hold on the viewer than the curving *cantabile* of Abbado's gestures. In this regard, the most compelling testament of Haitink and the Concertgebouw is saved for last with the DVD films (sadly not remastered for Blu-ray) of their Christmas Day ('Kerstmatinee') performances of Mahler. Even more than the justly celebrated studio account, the final *Adagio* of the Third unfolds as if turning the pages of an illuminated manuscript. The finale of the Ninth from 1987 likewise takes its time over the studio version, sustained in the moment with a warmth and generosity absent from his later and bleaker visions of the piece. In these films is the Haitink I will choose to remember. G

THE RECORDINGS

Complete Studio Recordings
Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra / Bernard Haitink
Decca (113 CDs + ④ DVD) 485 2737

Breaking out of the Baroque

Edward Breen welcomes the reissue of John Eliot Gardiner's pioneering Erato legacy

What feels like a very short decade ago, James Jolly celebrated Sir John Eliot Gardiner's 70th birthday in this magazine and reflected that Gardiner was 'the first conductor to follow a very modern trajectory', also noting that 'the alignment of Gardiner's career with the Golden Years of the recording industry allowed him to record extensively'. Both points are amply reflected in this handsome box-set of Gardiner's complete Erato recordings, which span a period of rapid growth in his recording activities throughout the 1980s. Sixty-four discs from 1976 to 1990 – and one outlier from 1995 ('England, my England': music from the soundtrack to Tony Palmer's film about the story of Henry Purcell) – are testament to an extraordinarily impressive musical appetite and insatiable curiosity, and all this while he was also recording for DG Archiv Produktion (among others). The set also includes three *Gramophone* Award winners: Handel's *Dixit Dominus* (1978) and *L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato* (1980), and Leclair's *Scylla et Glaucus* (1988).

The Monteverdi Choir and Monteverdi Orchestra were, of course, long established by the start of this relationship with Erato, but among the unique moments captured by this collection are the beginning of the English Baroque Soloists, the period-instrument ensemble founded in 1978, and the five years (1983-88) when Gardiner was music director of the Opéra National de Lyon, where he founded an entirely new orchestra. He produced a particularly astounding account of Chabrier's *L'étoile* in 1984, when the Lyon orchestra was just a year old, and there followed several more treasures from the French repertoire. Throughout this collection the Monteverdi Choir are a unifying presence, collaborating with all three orchestras. Theirs is a choral rather than consort sound, characterised by a superbly clear sense of line and reliably warm tone. Talking to Alan Blyth for *Gramophone* in 1975, Gardiner reflected: 'My ideas about Monteverdi developed really out of a reaction to the preciosity of King's [College Choir, Cambridge]. I saw their musical abilities but realised they were buried in 19th-century tradition. I felt it was a challenge to create a choir that could sound more Mediterranean, hence the Monteverdi [Choir] was formed.'

Yet Gardiner's Erato relationship stops short of his next big project: the Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique, founded in 1989. Erato may not have recorded this group but you can feel Gardiner's appetite for Romantic music already brewing in these Erato years, particularly with his fine accounts of Schubert and Bizet symphonies with the Orchestra of the Opéra de Lyon. I wonder whether Gardiner was one of the main people to cross Laurence Dreyfus's mind back in 1984 when he memorably described the early music movement in *The Musical Quarterly* as 'casting a covetous glance at the 19th century'.

> Gardiner's performances have plenty of style whether or not he uses period instruments

Many but by no means all of the discs in this set fall into the once clearly defined early music category of works pre-1750, and some overspill at a time when even the Classical period was contested territory. To use period instruments was once in itself a statement of protest and Robert Layton's now infamous remark about late Haydn and Mozart in this magazine – 'in so many instances the strings of authentic ensembles sound about as beautiful as period dentistry' (5/81) – summed up the strength of partisanship in the early '80s. But while some conductors took sides and became entrenched in one camp or the other, Gardiner continued to work with both modern and period players with huge success, his musical appetite seemingly inspired rather than daunted by historical musicology, and his strings always highly polished.

Talking to Carolyn Nott in *Gramophone* (5/79), Gardiner explained his then pragmatic approach to period instruments: at one point in the late '70s he chose not to use them for a performance of Monteverdi's *Vespers* in Westminster Cathedral because 'a small-scale baroque group would have been totally lost in such a vast auditorium'. It's this sort of comment that I admire, because historically informed performance is as much about a sense of style as it is the sonority of period instruments or careful editorial work, and Gardiner's performances have plenty of style whether or not he uses period instruments. Take, for instance, a pair of albums lying either side of his crossover point: that Award-winning Handel *Dixit Dominus* (3/78) with the Monteverdi Choir and Orchestra is a vivid – and I would argue dramatic – performance of the composer's youthful work; a recording that has lost little of its impact over some 45 years. Oddly enough it is the modern strings of the Monteverdi Orchestra that can sound most dated – at moments such as the opening of 'Tecum principium in die virtutis', for example – and once or twice I find the soloists' approach a little staunch. The clarity of the opening chorus, though, is superb (as is the chorus about judging nations, 'Judicabit in nationibus', with its cruel, shaking laughter depicted in 'conquassa-a-a-a-bit'). Certainly, this stylish and committed modern-instrument performance set the scene for the cut and thrust of later, faster recordings on period instruments such as Andrew Parrott's Taverner Choir and Players over a decade later (EMI Reflexe, 6/89).

Now turn to Bach's youthful Cantata No 4, *Christ lag in Todesbanden*, recorded just three years later with the recently formed period-instrument English Baroque Soloists. It still has Gardiner's trademark precision in all parts, but without any hint of reticence it's steeped in a rich, warm melancholy that Nicholas Anderson referred to as 'pervasive sadness' (11/82). This, for me, is an important disc, a reminder that period-instrument performance doesn't automatically mean fast tempos. Here, more than ever, the pull-quote that adorns the side of this new packaging seems so apt: 'My love for baroque music has never been exclusive. Of course, I am attracted by period instruments, but that has never been an end in itself. For me, it is simply a matter of always moving further towards the truth, towards a fresh interpretation.'

Both recordings hail from a fertile patch in the late '70s and early '80s, when the Erato relationship was in its infancy. Notable particularly is a keen sense of Handelian drama, which led Roger Fiske to comment on some vivid frogs in *Israel in Egypt* (1/80), which 'never jumped more realistically'. He also drew direct comparison with Simon Preston on Argo (4/76), who deployed boy trebles, going as far as to doubt 'if Handel would have ever have wanted boys again if he could have heard Gardiner's singers'.

Redefining a tradition: John Eliot Gardiner's influential recordings for Erato span the 1980s

A career of fine performances of Bach and Handel would be sufficient to secure a memorial in the early music pantheon but Gardiner, in these Erato years, was also trailblazing for Rameau, and especially *Les Boréades*. Having found an original manuscript in Paris in the early '70s, he immediately recognised its genius and worked on his own transcription. In his 1979 conversation with Carolyn Nott he remarked on the cramped nature of Rameau's handwriting, observing sympathetically that it seemed to suffer from 'a sort of Parkinson's wobble' (you and me both, Jean-Philippe!) but he also spotted that it contained rehearsal markings for the Paris Opéra as well as scribbled messages between composer and copyist. His resulting recording (10/83) followed acclaimed performances in Bruges and London. I still vividly remember first hearing the beautiful sound of the *contredanse en rondeau* from Act 1, so calm, so confident and so graceful. It is perhaps this assured sense of style that has allowed it to fare so well with age.

From the late '70s, when Thomas Allen and John Tomlinson sang Purcell, to the late '80s, when Lynne Dawson sang Gluck and Diana Montague sang Berlioz, Gardiner has always had a fine ear for his vocal soloists. I'm particularly glad that this Erato set includes Anne Sofie von Otter, Brigitte Fournier and Barbara Hendricks in Berlioz's 1866 revision of Gluck's *Orphée et Eurydice* (2/90) – the perfect project to celebrate the many talents of Gardiner and his remarkable musicians. Yet it is my bête noire that such a sumptuous collection does not carry, or link to, original booklet notes: in this case it is particularly frustrating not to have listings of all the original parts that Berlioz cut and which this recording restored – although a glance through our *Gramophone* reviews archive will certainly help.

The reissued CDs are each presented in cardboard sleeves depicting original album artwork and track information, including recording dates, venues and catalogue numbers. There is a small booklet with an excellent and enjoyable article by Loïc Chahine providing the background to Gardiner's career and encouraging us to see him through a wider prism than simply as a baroque specialist. Notably, Chahine draws attention to the influence of both Nadia Boulanger and Thurston Dart, as well as George Malcolm. When you consider the network of connections that Gardiner made at university in the early '60s, which included fellow students David Munrow and Christopher Hogwood, it would seem that Cambridge was then something of a Darmstadt for early music.

As we continually seek to widen the canon of classical music, we have here an account of a time when the public appetite for such music was at once made broader and more inclusive. Just as I gasp in disbelief that such treasures as Handel's *Tamerlano* were once considered edgy, I hope that before long I will similarly smirk at the idea that, say, Amy Beach or Samuel Coleridge-Taylor were once neglected. Through this Erato retrospective I feel encouraged to look forwards as much as back, and that's one of the many reasons that just before the last CD here was released Gardiner won the 1994 *Gramophone* Artist of the Year. Sometimes you need a solid box-set to prove that Sir John Eliot Gardiner's career simply can't be put into a metaphorical box. G

THE RECORDINGS

The Complete Recordings on Erato
John Eliot Gardiner
Erato (64 CDs) 5419 72055-1

PHOTOGRAPHY: JACQUES SARRAT

Cool choral Corboz

Peter Quantrill pays another visit to the late Swiss conductor's collected recordings

In reviewing the first box dedicated to the Erato legacy of the Swiss conductor Michel Corboz (12/22), I recommended holding out for this companion volume devoted to 19th- and 20th-century repertoire. This may have been a mistake. Listening to compendious box-sets sometimes pulls into focus pervasive traits that hardly draw attention to themselves on individual albums, like spending a fortnight on holiday with someone you otherwise see over dinner now and then, and discovering all their funny little ways.

Michel Corboz: a Romantic approach to Classical idioms

Corboz was first and foremost a choral conductor, with all the implied limitations of the term. He took particular pride in his first, 1972 version of Fauré's Requiem, but the pace of the opening *Kyrie* is so slow that the ear is naturally drawn not to the choral lines but to the string bass. The Introit to Mozart's Requiem resembles a Bach chorale played by a student who is so intent on articulating the left hand on the Great that they have forgotten to register the melody on the Swell. As in certain late Celibidache performances, there is something perversely opulent and luscious about the legato phrasing of the 'Tuba mirum' that has nothing to do with the text.

Haydn's *St Cecilia Mass* and *Stabat mater*, Beethoven's Mass in C and Schubert's *Magnificat* and *Stabat mater* are likewise holed under the waterline by warm-bath acoustics, a Romantic approach to fundamentally Classical idioms, and recorded/performing balances that favour accompanying instruments over vocal melodies. Verdi's Requiem fares better, largely thanks to its Italianate cast of soloists, but Puccini would surely have listened on incredulously to hear his *Messa di Gloria* so miniaturised in expressive scope; it takes only a phrase or two of Pappano's EMI/Warner recording (10/01) to hear a world of difference.

Jean-Philippe Grosperrin appears to share some of my reservations in his candid and insightful essay. For a box full of Requiems, psalms and other entreaties to the Almighty, there is little sense of the numinous about these recordings. The handling of choral counterpoint and *cantabile* lines is so consistently scrupulous as to deny the listener any passing illusion of spiritual crisis or transcendence. A sleepy *German Requiem* – no existential dread in the solemn unfolding of Robert Holl's solos – will convert no one, to either the piece or its unorthodox theology.

Eccentricities aside, Corboz never settled for anything less than beautifully moulded choral singing

Where the set holds value is in conveniently gathering up otherwise hard-to-find works in technically impeccable recordings. Eccentricities of voice-leading aside, Corboz never settled for anything less than beautifully moulded choral singing and precise ensemble. The Requiem by João Domingos Bomtempo, a Portuguese contemporary of Beethoven, emerges as a major addition to the Viennese-Classical sacred literature, scarcely confined by liturgical convention (a major-key 'Dies irae' is quite the curio).

The 1855 Requiem of Franz von Suppé has attracted more recordings, but none (that I can find) as blazing in delivery of its German-Verdi idiom as Corboz and his Gulbenkian forces. Such rarities seem to get the conductor's blood up. A quintet of French organ Masses – by Gounod, Saint-Saëns, Langlais, Vierne and Albert Alain (father of Marie-Claire and Jehan) – brings the best out of Corboz, without an orchestra in the way, palpably firing up his singers. With not only *Elias* and *Paulus* (in their German versions) but motets and psalms and more, Mendelssohn is handsomely served: in their fully orchestrated form, the scant excerpts from *Christus* make one regret as bitterly as ever that death prevented him from making so little progress on what should have been the crowning glory of his choral music.

Placing such store as he did in chant as formative for vocal training, Corboz barely touched the music of his time (and never conducted the *Missa solemnis*, 'because it breaks the voices'). He is given full credit here for a 1971 version of *Les noces* conducted by Charles Dutoit, for whom he prepared the chorus: 'I don't feel much affinity with this music,' as he remarked to Antoine Bosshard for a book of conversations published in 2001. The outstanding exception was his fellow countryman Frank Martin, whom he praised in the same breath as Bach, 'at once earthly and deeply spiritual'.

When Cascavelle released his 1994 live account of Martin's Passion oratorio *Golgotha*, Michael Oliver found it 'a most moving performance' (9/01), but Grosperrin prefers the Erato version of 1968, when Corboz acted as chorusmaster for his friend Robert Faller, a one-time assistant to Markevitch. Faller grips the piece like a true conductor; the self-taught Corboz, meanwhile, never quite accommodated himself to his chosen métier. 'I don't conduct,' he said to Bosshard, 'any more than the leader of a string quartet conducts his colleagues.' And in order to achieve the immaculate choral intonation heard throughout these two boxes, he demanded that the singers (and himself) keep their cool: 'a touch of heat or exuberance, and the tuning suffers.' Which may account for both the strengths and the shortcomings of these recordings. G

THE RECORDINGS

The Complete Erato Recordings
Classical & Romantic Eras **Michel Corboz**
Erato (36 CDs) 5419 71867-8

PHOTOGRAPHY: JACQUES SARRAT

BOX-SET *Round-up*

Rob Cowan explores compact collections from a quartet of quartets and their guests

A handsomely packaged set of Mozart's complete string quartets from AVI-Music by the **Armida Quartet** immediately establishes itself as competitive (incidentally, there are two two-CD slipcases and three single CDs housed in a box – seven CDs in all rather than five as stated on the box). The performances' virtues include the degree of freedom they bring to the Trio of the Menuetto from No 23 in F, K590, and their smiling though virtuoso account of the same quartet's madcap finale. They can also make hay with the early works, such as No 2 in D, K155, where their mastery of dynamics arrests one's attention within seconds of the work's opening. Or there's the virtual suspension of vibrato for much of the theme-and-variations third movement of No 18 in A, K464, as effective as it is unusual. The second movement of the *Hoffmeister* Quartet (in D, K499, a personal favourite) enjoys a swiftly whispering Trio and there's the quartet's warm yet dynamic approach to the *Hunt* Quartet's opening *Allegro vivace assai*.

No 15 in D minor (K421) is perhaps the most intense of the six 'Haydn' Quartets, the sauntering finale variations especially (at its most effective if played with repeats intact, as here). And there's the *Adagio* opening of the *Dissonance* Quartet, which draws to its climaxes pretty swiftly (as marked) and again comes across as appropriately intense. These recent recordings, which employ Urtexts edited by Wolf-Dieter Seiffert (drawing on, and here I quote, 'the large body of modern knowledge concerning Mozart philology and performance'), are realistically balanced. Their scholarly intent in no way compromises their musical effectiveness, which is considerable.

Heard alongside the Armida's *Dissonance*, the **Belcea Quartet**'s recording from 2005 suggests, at least initially, a world of infinite desolation (the opening *Adagio* is far slower than the Armida) that casts off its sad rags as soon as the tempo shifts to *Allegro*. This is keen, assertive playing, expressive yet bright in texture for a performance that differs from the Armida's in another key respect: repeats, in both the first movements and the finales (the first movement of the *Dissonance* clocks up 14'07" as opposed to the Armida's 10'15"). The Belcea's *Hoffmeister* again offers significant repeats and a light, witty account of the finale. This set also includes Britten's music for string quartet, the Third and last quartet having been selected by Geraint Lewis in his November 2014 *Gramophone* Collection on the piece as 'impeccable throughout … this is the most perfect of all the performances, the closest in spirit and execution to the Amadeus; and so, ruled by head, I would opt for this'. Reviewing a EuroArts DVD of the group playing all three quartets (10/15), Richard Fairman observed: 'The central *Vivace* of the Second Quartet is trenchant in the hands of the Amadeus, where the Belcea sense the storms of *Peter Grimes* out to sea. The Amadeus announce the great "Chacony" with measured wisdom, the Belcea with a kick of the intensity to come.' David Fanning approved of the Belcea's Bartók set (5/08), remarking that the Emerson and Takács Quartets (both of them *Gramophone* Award winners) 'for all their exciting flair and agility … often sound like outsiders looking in'. I'm not sure I would go quite that far, certainly not in the case of the Third, where the closing recapitulation, although fully fired up, sounds momentarily muddled. Otherwise, these 'worlds apart' are very vividly projected.

The Belcea's 'Complete Warner Classics Edition' also includes sharp-edged performances of the Debussy, Dutilleux and Ravel quartets, Brahms's First Quartet and Second Quintet, Fauré's adorable song-cycle *La bonne chanson* (with Ian Bostridge), works by Barber and George Butterworth, and selected Schubert: the String Quintet with the Alban Berg Quartet's cellist, Valentin Erben, the *Trout* Quintet with pianist/composer Thomas Adès and the last two quartets, the tensely performed, glacial G major (the hushed first subject has a Brucknerian aura about it) featuring a first movement that because of its long exposition repeat clocks up an expansive 22'05".

A five-CD Schubert set featuring the **Alban Berg Quartet** and guests also includes the G major's repeat but chosen tempos mean a marginally more concise 20'45" (and Warner doesn't split this highly concentrated masterpiece between CDs, which they do on the Belcea set, unfortunately). The Alban Berg offer us intelligent, full-bodied Schubert with a distinctively Viennese accent. The majorly gifted pianist in the *Trout* is Elisabeth Leonskaja, while cellist Heinrich Schiff does the honours in the String Quintet.

The **Stenhammar Quartet** were the first to propose complete coverage on CD of their namesake's distinctive complete quartet cycle, including the premiere recording of a quartet in F minor that Stenhammar withdrew from his official catalogue after completing it. Right from the bracing first bars of the official First Quartet in C, Op 2 (with its echoes of Grieg), you sense that here is a voice to reckon with. The Second Quartet has an air of tragedy about it (the finale is marked *Allegro energico e serioso*), whereas the Sixth Quartet's more lyrical slant provides another diversion to unexpected realms. The SACD recordings are superb, and the music well worth getting to know. G

THE RECORDINGS

Mozart Complete String Quartets **Armida Qt**
AVI-Music ⑦ AVI8553523

The Complete Warner Classics Edition
Belcea Qt Warner Classics ⑪ 5419 72114-3

Schubert String Quartets, etc **Alban Berg Qt**
Warner Classics ⑤ 5419 72057-9

Stenhammar String Quartets **Stenhammar Qt**
BIS ③ SACD BIS2709

REPLAY

Rob Cowan's monthly survey of historic reissues and archive recordings

An Adolf Busch sound-alike

The only violinist whose playing reminds me of the exalted German musician Adolf Busch is Erica Morini (1904-95), an Austrian virtuoso who completed her studies at the Vienna Conservatory under Otakar Ševčík (who was also the teacher of Jan Kubelík). Annotator Tully Potter, Busch's principal biographer who has written the notes for this extremely rewarding collection, also acknowledges a parallel (specifically in this context in the *Adagio* from Mozart's E flat Sonata, K481). Morini's similarity to Busch is basically in the way she coaxes the note on a mounting crescendo, in her crisp attack of the bow along runs of shorter notes, and her chosen varieties of portamento, which are very Busch-like in their distinctive curlicues. The unsuspecting listener might initially find that both players sound rather old-fashioned, which isn't unreasonable given the vintage provenance of their distinctive stylistic gestures.

Still, listen carefully and the experience delivers handsomely. I'd recommend comparing the two players in the last movement of Beethoven's *Spring* Sonata where for at least the first minute or so you could as well be listening to the same violinist (and pianist, Rudolf Firkušný, not dissimilar to Busch's son-in-law Rudolf Serkin on his HMV 78s) but in a later recording. Turn then to Brahms's Second Sonata, where Morini is partnered by Leon Pommers, and compare them with Busch and Serkin at the start of the finale: again, the similarity is uncanny. Morini's long-breathed phrasing works wonders at the start of the Third Sonata, her handling of the *Adagio* where her slides approximate a great lieder singer in their songful effect an object lesson in how to perform this music. Were I to single out the key to her mastery it would be her use of the bow, its seamless mobility, and the way she enters a phrase ever so quietly before peaking as the line swells, or her keen manner of attack, whether with single, double or multiple stops. Her prowess is as much musical as technical: you sense a compatible marriage of mind and feeling.

The duo sonatas with Firkušný, all of them recorded in stereo, are uniformly superb. Here we have a duo that shares an equal footing, each partner sensing where the other is coming from. Franck's Sonata can rarely have enjoyed a more persuasive recording, certainly not in recent years, Firkušný's selfless grandeur offset by Morini's chaste expressivity. Try the finale, where you'll hear what I mean about Morini's skilful bowing, while Firkušný's crystal-clear pianism – which additionally admits a wide range of colour and dynamics – underpins the violin's silvery tone.

The theme and variations that conclude Mozart's E flat Sonata offer another demonstration of why this partnership works so well, especially with regard to the transitions from one variation to the next. The other Beethoven sonatas are No 3 in E flat, No 7 in C minor and No 8 in G. No 7 always provides a testing ground for players who ideally need to strike a workable balance between drama (first and last movements), longing (the *Adagio cantabile* slow movement) and playfulness (the Scherzo), which our accomplished duo always do, especially in the Scherzo, which communicates fun aplenty but is not too fast.

Earlier music (two discs' worth, both with Pommers) includes, most famously, Tartini's *Devil's Trill* Sonata, where Morini displays an expert handling of rhythm, trills, multiple stops and a singing coloratura line. And there are the quartet recordings, Morini like Eudice Shapiro (see below) collaborating with like-minded colleagues (violinist Felix Galimir, viola player Walter Trampler and cellist Laszlo Varga) in Beethoven's pensive C minor Quartet, Op 18 No 4, and Mozart's F major Quartet, K590 (the latter represented in mono and stereo recordings, both from June 1956), thoughtful performances caringly negotiated.

There's an appealing disc of genre pieces, too, mostly gathered around the personality of Fritz Kreisler (who claimed that no one played his music like Morini), and there are the concertos. The Brahms and Tchaikovsky concertos find Morini in collaboration with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in 1956 under Artur Rodzinski, consistently stylish performances brilliantly executed, as are the Glazunov and Bruch First concertos with the Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra under Ferenc Fricsay from 1958. The disappointments, for me at least, are 1962-65 recordings of Mozart's Fourth and Fifth Concertos and the A minor and E major Bach Concertos with the Princeton Chamber and Musica Aeterna orchestras respectively (under Nicholas Harsanyi and Frederic Waldman), which, although musically sensitive, come across as rather dry. Otherwise, I have nothing but praise for this artistically rewarding and beautifully presented set.

THE RECORDING

The Art of Erica Morini
DG ⑬ 486 3255

Playing from the heart

If Morini took a cue or two from Adolf Busch, Buffalo-born Eudice Shapiro (1914-2007) was audibly appreciative of Jascha Heifetz, who as it happens returned the compliment: Shapiro would often perform alongside Heifetz and Piatigorsky in chamber music, and she's clearly audible as concertmaster on a number of Heifetz's RCA recordings. As well as playing solo, Shapiro established the American Art Quartet with her first husband, cellist Victor Gottlieb, violinist Robert Sushel and viola player Virginia Majewski. In the context of this wonderful collection, 'The Art of Eudice Shapiro', the quartet is represented by a sequence of short movements that were originally issued on vinyl (RCA Bluebird) as 'String Quartet Melodies'. The playing is fully up to the Heifetz-Piatigorsky standard, luscious yet refined, opening with a sizzling account of the Scherzo from Mendelssohn's E minor

Quartet. Tchaikovsky's *Andante cantabile* has possibly never been more movingly played on disc, not even by the Russians or Ukrainians, Shapiro's viola-like violin (at 4'44") totally seductive. Wolf's *Italian Serenade* goes with a real swing, all four players perfectly matched and acutely observant of Wolf's written markings. Is there any quartet-playing on disc that equals this for technical perfection? If there is I have yet to hear it. And there's Frank Bridge's imaginative setting of *An Irish Melody: Londonderry Air*, an ingenious arrangement that repeatedly hints at the theme yet to come, only giving way with a glorious welter of sound at full throttle (at 4'51"), playing that could have emerged from a soundtrack such as that for *The Quiet Man*. But then over the years Shapiro not only served as leader for many Hollywood studios but appeared on albums featuring such quality ballad singers as Frank Sinatra, Ella Fitzgerald, Ray Charles and a number of jazz greats. The album opens with Shapiro's only concerto recording, Mozart's Fifth with the NBC Symphony under Frank Black (1944), beautiful, incisive and audibly Heifetzian, and closes with a couple of unforgettable Victor Young 'weepies', *Je vous adore* and *Stella by Starlight*. This CD is an absolute must for anyone who cares about great violin-playing.

THE RECORDING

The Art of Eudice Shapiro
Biddulph 85025-2

Yet more great fiddling

The Polish-American violinist Bronislav (or Bronisław) Gimpel (1911-79) started piano and violin lessons with his father when he was just five years old and in 1925, at the age of 14, played the Goldmark Concerto with the Vienna Symphony Orchestra (his recordings of the work are among the finest ever made). Gimpel's legacy for Vox has been reappearing on CD in stages, the latest instalment courtesy of Biddulph, whose first Gimpel double-pack couples Vox recordings of Wieniawski's Second Concerto (1956) and Paganini's First (same year, presented in Wilhemj's one-movement version) conducted by Rolf Reinhardt, and Beethoven's Concerto (1955) under Heinrich Hollreiser. Also featured is a 1960 recording of the Tchaikovsky Concerto, originally on the Opera label, and, from 1956 on DG, the full five-movement version of Lalo's *Symphonie espagnole*. The playing is supremely confident with a firm, swift vibrato, although for the Beethoven Gimpel's approach (employing Kreisler's first-movement cadenza) is fairly classical. Come the Lalo that follows, his vibrato intensifies and Gimpel's overall handling of the score admits a higher level of expressive freedom. Fritz Rieger's Munich Philharmonic accompaniment is as tight as a drum in the dramatic Intermezzo third movement. The Tchaikovsky Concerto (under Johannes Schüler) is more romantic still, the first movement very much in the tradition of the Auer school. Likewise the Paganini, which cuts in rather abruptly. It's worth noting that Doremi has also started a Gimpel series (Vol 1, a programme of live recordings, is out on DHR81634) and includes another fine Wieniawski Second (with Earl Wild conducting) and a Sibelius Concerto with the Berlin Philharmonic under Eugen Jochum which, even considering a dizzying array of historical CD competition, is among the finest ever recorded. But this Biddulph double-pack is highly desirable and very well transferred from vinyl originals.

THE RECORDING

Beethoven. Tchaikovsky, etc
Violin Concertos
Bronislav Gimpel
Biddulph ② 85024-2

Barbirolli's Great C major

The differences between John Barbirolli captured live and his studio recordings are often striking. Think only of his various studio/live Mahler performances, and especially the blazing January 1959 New York Philharmonic account of Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* (Somm, 9/22) as opposed to the more temperate HMV Hallé recording (Warner, 10/65). And then there's Schubert. Regarding Barbirolli's 1964 HMV recording, Edward Greenfield opined (2/66) that 'throughout the performance his tempi are beautifully judged'. What, I wonder, might Ted have thought of a Royal Albert Hall performance taped a year later that is notably more urgent than not only its immediate studio predecessor but also Barbirolli's 1953 mono Hallé version (11/54)? There are times when you could as well be listening to a Toscanini/Furtwängler synthesis, the former in the first movement's heated *Allegro ma non troppo*, the latter in the excited way Barbirolli escorts us into the *Allegro* from the *Andante* opening (from 3'23"). The Hallé's woodwinds are precisely pointed and the transition to the second subject is in no way compromised by the faster tempo (13'07" as opposed to 14'41" overall on HMV). The contrast is even more noticeable in the second moment (14'24" in the studio, 12'05" live), the central ruckus with its warring brass (7'06") fiercely dramatic live. The last two movements are also significantly faster than they are on the Kingsway Hall sessions, the performance as a whole sounding as if all concerned were diving into this magnificent score just for the love of playing it. Debussy's *Nocturnes* from six days later are also wonderful, 'Nuages' especially, a magical evocation, beautifully executed. Over the years the Barbirolli Society has treated us to some remarkable recordings but this I think has to be among the very finest of them. The (mono) sound more than passes muster. G

Violinist Erica Morini: long-breathed phrasing and seamless mobility

THE RECORDING

Schubert Sym No 9
Debussy Nocturnes
Hallé Orch / John Barbirolli
Barbirolli Society SJB1112

PHOTOGRAPHY: ASSOCIATED PRESS/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Classics RECONSIDERED

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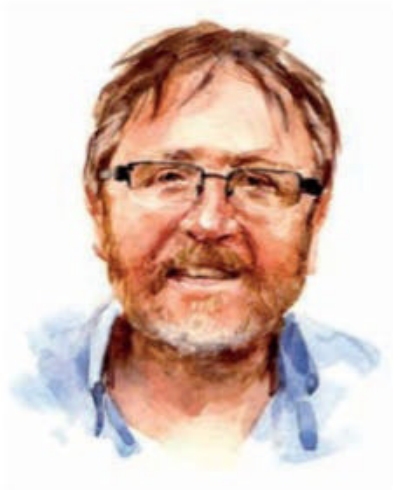
CELEBRATING A CENTURY OF RECORDED CLASSICAL MUSIC

Rob Cowan and **Andrew Achenbach** take our special decade-by-decade focus into the 1950s, with Kubelík's Chicago recording of Smetana's Má vlast



Smetana

Má vlast

Chicago Symphony Orchestra / Rafael Kubelík

Mercury

The collection of six tone poems, *My Fatherland*, by Smetana, is one of those things that people often say should be done more often: but really, are they all that good? And isn't the public perfectly right in choosing the ever-popular 'Vltava' as the one it enjoys hearing? 'Sarka' is perhaps neglected and might be brought into the concert repertory. But the others seem to me to have been written at a very variable level of inspiration. How well 'Tabor' starts, for instance – most imaginatively – but how soon it gets dull: and much of the allegro stuff in these pieces only just gets by because of its energy. If you don't agree, write and protest! But please be honest and do so only after you have listened again carefully right through the whole work.

And you can now do so, for Kubelík does his best and the orchestra plays well. Unfortunately the recording is less satisfactory. It tends to shrillness, as American recordings so often seem to do, and it is not as clear as it should be. Balance, especially of the percussion, is extremely unreliable. Just after the start of 'Tabor', for instance, timpani should come in with a *mf* accent and a diminuendo through the *pp* of the rest of the orchestra – completely missing. Cymbals often sound as if they are fired from a gun: but at a moment of real climax (in 'Bohemia's Woods and Fields', for instance) they are not to be heard. As for the triangle, it might as well not be there and many passages greatly lack its touch of colour.

A pity, when conductor and orchestra seem to have taken so much trouble. Yet Kubelík presumably heard and passed these discs. Do things really sound so different on American apparatus? **Trevor Harvey** (09/56)

Rob Cowan In our issue for June 1935 a missive from one James C Fletcher of Lancashire opines, regarding the first-ever complete recording of Smetana's six-tier cycle of tone poems *Má vlast*, or 'My Fatherland' (Czech Philharmonic/Václav Talich, HMV, 1929): 'I already have two numbers and am shortly hoping to complete the set. Procuring these records from Czechoslovakia is both a costly and a slow business, however. Is it too much to hope that The Gramophone Company should allow us the benefit of these recordings in this country? Perhaps other readers of *The Gramophone* will have delved sufficiently far into Smetana's life to wonder what has become of his compositions other than "Die Moldau" [sic] and "The Bartered Bride".' Many years ago, a kindly uncle presented me with a heavy tin box containing the original shellac discs of that very recording – then, as now, a great rarity. For me the cycle's masterpiece is its third chapter, about the female warrior Šárka, a central figure in ancient Czech legend. Talich's approach to the love music (marked *Moderato ma con calore*, or 'to be played with warmth at a moderate tempo') is fairly sober, whereas my lightning-bolt introduction to the piece (Rafael Kubelík with the Vienna Philharmonic, Decca, 1958) throws caution to the winds and breathlessly accelerates through the same passage, Kubelík's reaction to the music deeply personal rather than prompted by any written suggestion on Smetana's part.

Andrew Achenbach For my own part, I'm pretty sure it was through Paavo Berglund's eloquent and uncommonly articulate 1978 Staatskapelle Dresden recording that I first encountered this music, coupled with an exceptionally fine Dvořák *Scherzo capriccioso* – and I know for a fact, having interviewed the Finnish maestro back in the 1990s, that he was mightily proud of that EMI set. Kubelík came later, first his Boston SO account on DG, then the live performance from 1990 with the Czech Phil; I didn't hear the present 1952 Chicago version until the rollout of those marvellous Mercury Living Presence CDs. You rightly single out 'Šárka' – and I share your view that it's the cycle's highpoint. In fact, it's surely one of the most exhilarating of all tone-poems in the Lisztian tradition – and Kubelík and the Chicago SO generate a memorably combustible expressive clout and energy in both the inspired secondary material and giddy ride to the finish. Whether the disconcertingly rough engineering does it all sufficient justice is another matter entirely; sonically speaking, it's not a patch on, say, this same team's famous Mussorgsky/Ravel *Pictures at an Exhibition* from April of the previous year.

RC Trevor Harvey would have agreed with you about Mercury's sound. In his original review (9/56) he wrote 'Unfortunately, the recording is less satisfactory. It tends to shrillness, as American recordings so often seem to do, and it is not as clear as it should be.' Then again, he wasn't to know – none

Kubelík with his Chicago musicians: they first played Má vlast in October 1952, shortly before recording it

of us were – that Mercury had in their vaults an 'experimental stereo' take of 'Tábor' (stereo being a rumour in those days rather than a familiar concept), an extraordinarily vivid recording engineered at the same (1952) sessions by Bert Whyte (included in Eloquence's collection 'Rafael Kubelík: Chicago Symphony Orchestra, The Mercury Masters') that sounds more like 'Living Stereo' than 'Living Presence'. But what about rating the work as an entity? Harvey agrees that '"Šárka" is perhaps neglected and might be brought into the concert repertory …' adding that 'the others seem [to him] to have been written at a very variable level of inspiration.' Writing in the much-respected *The Record Guide* (Collins, 1955), Edward Sackville-West and Desmond Shawe-Taylor were more enthusiastic, claiming that 'Smetana's cycle stands revealed as a splendid, even magnificent composition'. I'd agree with them. And you?

AA I do now, though to be perfectly honest it wasn't until I eventually caught up with a Kubelík performance not yet mentioned by either of us that the cycle as a whole suddenly 'clicked' for me. I'm talking, of course, about his intensely communicative and pungently characterful partnership with the Bavarian RSO on Orfeo. Take the evergreen 'Vltava': one or two foibles aside (for instance, the return to the dominant of the home key of E minor at fig G or 7'05" is not remotely *pianissimo* as marked), the Chicago version is effective enough, but its infinitely more subtle 1984 counterpart from Munich's Herkulessaal is not only better coordinated but also brings with it a host of textural felicities (those antiphonally placed fiddles are a real boon), songful joy and sparkily imaginative interpretative touches that I for one find truly life-enhancing. 'Blaník', too, beams with a sense of occasion and cumulative fervour impossible to resist.

RC Another interesting aspect of that 1984 Munich 'Vltava' relates to the flutes in the opening two bars representing the river's starting point, marked *piano lusingando* (ie, to be 'coaxed'). How often do you hear the final quaver of each phrase as separate? Hardly ever. And if I may return momentarily to the DG Boston recording, the timpani make an especially strong showing in 'From Bohemia's Woods and Fields', the central polka at 8'05". They really dance, but they're barely audible in Chicago, and the stereo Decca version isn't much better. Most listeners who question *Má vlast*'s soundness tend to shake their heads over its overtly narrative and at times rather static closing episodes, 'Tábor' and 'Blánik'. But for me a performance's overall success depends largely on how the story's dénouement is handled, Kubelík's chest-swelling sense of national pride so often working wonders, no matter where he's conducting or with which orchestra. Only Talich and the Czech PO in Nazi-occupied Prague, 1939 (Supraphon) protest their cause with as much conviction, at least that's my view.

AA I'd endorse TH's observation that too much percussion detail gets lost in Chicago, though the experimental stereo in 'Tábor' gives a tantalizing taste of what might have been (and what a find in the Mercury archives that was!). Both it and 'Blaník' certainly demonstrate the formidable technical prowess and big-hearted dedication of this great orchestra – and the work's closing pages blaze as they should – but the performance somehow doesn't quite stack up the way Kubelík's Boston or Munich ones do (the superb timpanist in the former, by the way, was the legendary Vic Firth). Recorded in 1990 on his return to his homeland, Kubelík's live Prague traversal makes a valuable keepsake, but there are alternative Czech PO versions that I return to more frequently: do you rate Václav Smetáček's nobly unaffected and majestically paced conception as highly as I do?

RC I do indeed, Václav Neumann too (both in Prague and in Leipzig), though the image of a ruddy-faced Kubelík hiking over grassy terrains in all weathers seems to me to represent what *Má vlast* is all about – ruggedness, energy and pride. Those pioneering Chicago and Vienna recordings thrilled a generation and beyond. I wonder if 'live' recordings from the same period exist? If they do, I'd love to hear them: Kubelík in concert always pushed the boat out that little bit further. But as for now I relish the excitement that both these vintage recordings still prompt, whatever their minor flaws – though, like you, I still think that the Orfeo Munich recording steals the lead.

AA Assorted Talich offerings with the Czech Phil from the mono era have their own uniquely tangy lure and keen insights – and I also have a soft spot for Walter Weller's vibrant, excellently engineered Israel PO account on Decca (originally coupled on LP with a marvellously red-blooded *Hakon Jarl*). Yes, Kubelík's nourishing 1984 version remains the *Má vlast* I cherish above all others, but his Chicago/Mercury recording contains great things none the less: the adrenalin-fuelled central portion of 'Vysehrad' catches fire most thrillingly, as does the festive polka in 'From Bohemia's Woods and Fields'. It's infectious music-making by any standards.

PHOTOGRAPHY: ROSENTHAL ARCHIVES OF THE CHICAGO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA ASSOCIATION

Books

Richard Bratby reads about the work of four women composers:

'Leah Broad is unabashedly partisan and individual works are given the benefit of every conceivable doubt'

David Vickers peruses a valuable guide to opera in the 17th century:

'The essay on the invention and development of the libretto is a magisterial synthesis of scholarly acumen and perceptive prose'

Quartet

How Four Women Changed the Musical World
By Leah Broad
Faber & Faber, HB, 480pp, £20
ISBN 978-0-571-36610-1

It's not always easy to choose the name of a book. The 'Quartet' of Leah Broad's group biography comprises four composers: Ethel Smyth, Dorothy Howell, Rebecca Clarke and Doreen Carwithen. The subtitle is slippier. 'How four women changed the musical world': even with industrial quantities of special pleading, that's a difficult claim to substantiate. But then, any author who wants to sell copies – in other words, any author who's serious about communicating their subject – needs to grab the reader's attention. Broad explains early on that these composers have been chosen not so much for their musical significance (otherwise why choose Howell over Grace Williams, say, or Carwithen over Lutyens?) but for the different perspectives that they can offer on the experience of female composers in 20th-century Britain.

That Broad makes their stories so compelling – and tells them so vividly – bears out her choice, and makes it easy to overlook the various contrivances involved in crafting a single narrative from the lives of four women who almost never met. (Smyth supported Howell but accused Clarke of trading on her looks, which Broad glosses – plausibly enough, given Smyth's famously bluff manner – as a ham-fisted attempt at flirtation.) Each of the four set out to make a musical career in a world (the late 19th and early 20th centuries) where patronising assumptions about women composers were still widespread and ingrained. Each, depending on their personality and circumstances, took a very different path.

The results reveal as much about social class as gender, and if Broad is occasionally slapdash when sketching the broader historical context, her portraits of the four protagonists are formidably researched and wonderfully readable. Smyth dominates, as she tends to: ramming her way into opera houses and other people's marriages with all the determination (some might call it entitlement) of an independently wealthy daughter of the Raj. A damehood and Europe-wide performances for all seven of her operas suggests that it was an effective approach. Compare and contrast the reticent, devoutly Catholic Howell, whose symphonic poem *Lamia* brought her success at the Proms under Henry Wood, but whose decision to build her career outside of London marginalised her as surely then as it would today.

A generation later, Doreen Carwithen found success in the British film industry before choosing to subordinate her gifts to those of her husband (and former teacher) William Alwyn. And then there's Clarke, incontestably the finest composer of the four, who comes across as a thoroughly grounded professional, confident in her ability to work and create on her own terms. Forced into independence by a bullying father, she made her own career as a highly successful viola player while writing some of the most compelling chamber music of the inter-war period.

If you didn't already know that last point, I'm not entirely sure whether you'd realise it from *Quartet*. This isn't, primarily, a book about music, but about musicians in society: Broad is interested in the work principally as it shaped the lives, and anyone expecting balanced appraisal of these composers' music will need to look elsewhere. Broad is unabashedly partisan and individual works are given the benefit of every conceivable doubt. When contemporaries are lukewarm or sceptical about (say) Howell's Piano Concerto or Smyth's *The Prison*, it's taken as read that 'the critics' (Broad's unfortunate generalisation for what is sometimes only a single review) are prejudiced or in error.

Overclaiming is an occupational hazard when championing undervalued composers, whether Dorothy Howell or Havergal Brian. Ultimately, it helps no one to set Rebecca Clarke against Ravel, or to blame Britten for outclassing his contemporaries. Accusations of conspiracy are standard stuff among neglected 20th-century romantics: it's more exciting to assert that an individual has been 'written out of history' than to concede the mundane truth that – like the overwhelming majority of composers in all eras – they've simply faded from fashion. Meanwhile, however sincere one's indignation at Carwithen's truncated career, Faber has yet to publish a lavishly promoted biography of William Alwyn.

But these are peripheral matters. Broad is, for the most part, impressively even-handed towards her subjects; acknowledging their failings (and failures don't come much bigger than Smyth's self-sabotage of her opera *The Wreckers*), and – Alwyn apart – hesitating to judge even the various misguided males whom lazier thinkers might have cast as villains. *Quartet* is a page-turner; written in a lively, jargon-free style which Broad's fellow academic writers could do worse than study. At the end of it all, you really do feel you know these women, and (the acid test) you're eager to hear their music. They didn't change the musical world, but they might yet change yours. **Richard Bratby**

The Cambridge Companion to Seventeenth-Century Opera

Edited by Jacqueline Waeber
Cambridge University Press, 385pp,
HB: ISBN 978-0-521-82359-3; £74.99
PB: ISBN 978-0-521-53046-0; £22.99

A user-friendly introduction to 17th-century opera has long been overdue, and this collection plugs the gap nicely. The Cambridge Companion series has hallmarks of scholarly expertise and accessible prose in meticulously

Ethel Smyth is one of four women composers reappraised in a collective biography

commissioned chapters that cover almost everything the curious reader (and music lover) should need to know. That this is not quite perfectly the case with these 14 essays speaks volumes about the messy complexity of the birth of opera and the cross-fertilisation of its early pioneers – librettists, composers, performers, patrons, princely courts and public theatres.

Part 1, 'The Italian Foundations', is devoted to the stirrings of opera at the Medici court in Florence, its connections to religious music dramas in Rome, and the quick spread of these influences to the Gonzaga court in Mantua and beyond. Barbara Russano Hanning sets out the formative experiments of the Florentine Camerata trying to reimagine Greek classical drama as all-sung music, and how their ideas were applied to *intermedi* performed between acts of spoken dramas during court celebrations of special occasions. Within a few years several of the key protagonists in *La pellegrina* (1589) had created the first operas: Peri had collaborated with Rinuccini on *La Dafne* (1598) and *Euridice* (1600); the latter work sparked a rivalry with Caccini, who quickly rushed his own setting of the libretto into print, whereas Cavalieri returned to Rome and put on the religious opera *Rappresentatione di Anima, et di Corpo* (1600). From these early stages, it was a relatively short step to Monteverdi's *Orfeo* (1607) and Gagliano's *La Dafne* (1608). This narrative is repeated (with embellishments, one might say) in the next three chapters. Tim Carter's essay on the invention and development of the libretto is a magisterial synthesis of scholarly acumen and perceptive prose, and it is one of the few chapters to cover a perfectly balanced cross-section of Italian, English and French operas across the entire century. His explanation of syllabic structures in Italian poetry is duplicated by Sara Elisa Stangalino's chapter, which also unlocks how libretto texts evolved to incorporate arias (focusing especially on a range of examples from Cavalli's operas). Margaret Murata covers similar ground in case studies but from the perspective of them as dramatic presentations and visually extravagant spectacles.

In Part 2, 'Society, Institutions and Production', Beth L Glixon gives an information-packed digest of public opera in Italy from the opening of the first commercial opera house in Venice (Teatro San Cassiano, 1637) up to 1700. The gradual spread of entrepreneurial opera to the rest of Italy is summarised, although there is not much space given to the uneasy oscillations in Rome between private and public theatre productions. The gender politics of scandalous women appearing on the operatic stage are examined by Colleen Reardon, whose chapter also offers illuminating remarks about the training of castratos and the rise of the prima donna (tenors and basses are relegated to an epilogue). Christine Jeanneret summarises the controversies of sexuality and morality regarding women in opera, noting that the dodgy reputations of some female singers as courtesans (or worse) were occasionally truthful; there is a fascinating discussion of operas by Francesca Caccini and Élisabeth Jacquet de La Guerre. Rebecca Harris-Warrick explains that dancing played a much more prominent and closer part in operatic productions in Italy than is usually assumed; 297 of the 346 different operas produced in Venice between 1637 and 1700 included *balli*. Her essay also explains the close kinship between French courtly dance entertainments and Lully's development of opera featuring copious divertissements. Roger Savage writes with entertaining immediacy on the early history of staging, aspects of acting, visual production style, direction and mechanics of set designs and scene changes; four engravings that show 17th-century set designs ought to have been reproduced larger in landscape format.

Part 3 is a useful survey of national traditions outside Italy. Laura Naudeix contributes an overview of how French opera in the age of Lully amalgamated *ballet de cour*, the instrumental and vocal music of the Chambre du Roi, pastorals, Molière's comedies, and librettists inspired by Racine's classical-infused tragedies. A succinct appraisal of Lully's *tragédies en musique* and the comparable dominance of librettist Quinault does not leave much room for Charpentier, Campra and Marais. Jacqueline Waeber provides a perceptive discussion about distinctive musical and literary qualities that marked French singing and declamation apart from other operatic traditions (the term 'paradigmatic' appears a lot). Amanda Eubanks Winkler covers 17th-century English opera, describes the sporadic experiments that preceded and followed the Civil War, and observes how the flourishing of Restoration court masques and theatrical life became mingled in 'dramatick operas' such as Locke's *Psyche* (1675), Grabu's *Albion and Albanius* (1685) and Purcell's *King Arthur* (1691). Michael Maul explains the earliest evidence of all-sung musical dramas in Germany and Austria; there is a concise evaluation of Steffani's operas for Roman Catholic courts in Munich, Hanover and Düsseldorf, and a summary of Germany's first public opera houses in Hamburg (1678) and Leipzig (1693). Louise K Stein deals eruditely with Spain and its colonies; those looking for a focused discussion of opera in 17th-century Naples will need to look here on account of the art form being nurtured in the city by its Spanish viceroys.

A tighter editorial brief to authors might have avoided significant repetition across chapters, and there are some surprising lacunae in the book's coverage: Stradella is not mentioned even once in the entire book, and numerous other significant opera composers are given short shrift (Purcell and Campra deserved rather more words). There are a few contradictions between authors that ought to have been sorted out, and a small number of errors. The most amusing of these is Winkler's malapropism that 'Oliver Cromwell believed the public theatre to be a hotbed of inequity'. This explains the Lord Protector's formation of trade unions, no doubt. **David Vickers**

PHOTOGRAPHY: ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

THE GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION

Brahms's Violin Concerto in D major, Op 77

Brahms's Violin Concerto stands alongside Beethoven's at the peak of the instrument's repertoire. **Charlotte Gardner** makes a selection from almost a century of recordings

Critics don't always get it right. However, when the venerable Eduard Hanslick attended the Viennese premiere of Brahms's Violin Concerto on January 14, 1879, and declared it to be 'the most significant violin concerto to appear since Beethoven's and Mendelssohn's', he wasn't wrong.

It was also a concerto that wouldn't have existed without Brahms's deep, 20-year friendship with its first performer and dedicatee, Joseph Joachim. First, because it would take all the Hungarian virtuoso's prowess to get a handle on its significant technical demands, even having closely advised Brahms on the violin-writing. But also because, for all the soloist's blood, sweat and tears, it went against the virtuoso grain of the time. Composed alongside the First Violin Sonata, Op 78, it took shape during the summer of 1878 in the Austrian lakeside resort of Pörtschach am Wörthersee. This was where the previous summer Brahms had written his pastoral Second Symphony in D at record speed, and now the concerto nodded to that symphony not just in its own D major tonality and pastoral elements but also by initially being cast in four movements; and while that symphonic structure ultimately gave Brahms so much trouble that he replaced its original slow movement and scherzo with the single 'paltry *Adagio*' we have today, the work remained more a symphonic dialogue than a soloistic showpiece, at least until the finale. Essentially, therefore, only a loyal friend of Brahms, with composer blood running through his own veins, could have been both emotionally invested and intellectually interested enough to take on such a creation.

But what a creation to be attached to: an *Allegro ma non troppo* of power, lyricism and drama; an ardent *Adagio*; then a virtuosically brilliant *Allegro giocoso, ma non troppo vivace* flavoured with the folk music of Joachim's homeland that Brahms loved so much himself.

CHALLENGES AND QUESTIONS

A tight chamber dynamic between soloist and orchestra sits high on this work's list of desirable qualities. Similarly, as the orchestral score is one of deftly worked textural and timbral counterpoint, it would be a shame if that were rendered opaque by either the musicians or the engineering – a tough ask for early recording technology.

The concerto was praised after its true premiere – on New Year's Day 1879 in Leipzig – for being 'one of this composer's most approachable, translucent and spontaneous creations'. So, spontaneity. Obviously from the soloist, given that's what their lines invite, but there is also the question of the many mid-movement alternations between dramatic and softer sections, especially in the first. Clearly you should hit Brahms's own sparsely inserted *ritardandos*; but for the remainder, do you keep tempo consistent or opt for something more flexible and episodic? Most opt for the latter, to varying degrees. Whatever you do, it must not sound bitty. For this Collection, you can assume that the architectural handling is convincing unless otherwise stated.

A further first-movement tempo dilemma is that its overall *Allegro ma non troppo* ('fast but not too fast') directive opens the field to anything from leisurely paced grandeur to a faster lilt, subsequent movements then balanced accordingly. This Collection's durations thus range, staggeringly, between 35 minutes (Adolf Busch) and 47'10" (Rachel Barton Pine).

Finally, cadenzas. Brahms didn't consider himself violinistically expert enough to compose one, so he asked Joachim to do the honours. Joachim's has therefore become the de facto choice, but shouldn't be put on too high a pedestal: he didn't publish it until 1902, after Brahms's death, by which time he'd significantly lengthened and altered it – and away from the late Brahms's pleasure, because there also exists an as-yet-unrecorded 1884 version Brahms sketched out for one of his favourite interpreters, Joachim's pupil Marie Soldat, which restored it to what he remembered of his preferred Vienna 1879 incarnation. Of the other options, Kreisler's has been dusted off the most. Recent years have seen some champions for the Busoni, its bold timpani interjections nodding to Beethoven's Violin Concerto – the work that preceded it at the Leipzig premiere. For several in one place, look up Ruggiero Ricci's 1991 recording with the Sinfonia of London under Norman Del Mar (Biddulph, 2/92).

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Fritz Kreisler begins things in 1927, live with the Berlin State Opera Orchestra under Leo Blech (4/28; now on Biddulph, Naxos and Warner, 8/09), displaying the brisk tempos typical of the concerto's very earliest recordings. Kreisler himself is full of debonair charm but with a woolly, drily captured orchestra that also delivers a rather staid finale. His 1936 reading with John Barbirolli and the warmer, fuller and more red-blooded-sounding London Philharmonic Orchestra is more satisfying,

PHOTOGRAPHY: ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Johannes Brahms composed his Violin Concerto in 1878

and their stirring *Adagio* features one of this Collection's most flexible woodwind openings.

The Brahms is arguably not where **Jascha Heifetz** left his greatest contributions to recorded posterity. His 1955 studio take with Fritz Reiner and the Chicago SO (RCA, 3/56) has superior sound quality but the orchestra is nowhere near as on fire as what in 1935 Arturo Toscanini gets out of the New York Philharmonic, who snap thrillingly at Heifetz's heels through their first rising exchange. This live take has Heifetz his athletically aristocratic self, but with his upbeat tempos less uncomfortably racehorse and more about him than mere brilliance. Additionally, his adaptation of the cadenza by his teacher, Joachim pupil Leopold Auer, sounds less manic than his self-penned creation with Reiner.

In fact these earliest recordings tell of a generation less likely to plump for the Joachim cadenza. Take **Adolf Busch**, live before an enraptured audience in 1943 with the New York Philharmonic-Symphony and his friend William Steinberg. Presenting this Collection's briskest outer movements (18'57" and 7'10"), Busch sometimes struggles to stay on top not just of Brahms's lines but even his own cadenza. But that's also because he's absolutely giving it some, and infecting the orchestra as he goes – listen to the urgency with which the horn duets with him in the *Adagio* at 2'51". Essentially, for every slightly uncomfortable moment you get five more of soul-filled transcendence.

In 1944 comes a live reading with the New York Philharmonic-Symphony under Artur Rodzinski from Joachim pupil **Bronisław Huberman**, who aged 14 had moved Brahms to tears playing it. His fierily impetuous first movement is crowned by Hugo Heermann's gypsyish 1896 cadenza (no loyalty to Joachim there),

Brahms with the Concerto's dedicatee, Joseph Joachim

followed by a foxy *Adagio* – Huberman's final rising line's pronounced *portato* a prime example of his Joachim-inspired clean, relatively detached phrasing – and a springing finale. Rodzinski conducts as a true partner, and the between-movement applause and retunes add to the atmosphere.

Someone who did use the Joachim cadenza was Hungarian **Joseph Szigeti**, who studied with Joachim's pupil Jenő Hubay, and with the polished grandeur of the Philadelphia Orchestra and Eugene Ormandy in 1945 you get this Collection's best recorded sound so far, plus strong dialogue with a conductor who's a fellow Hungarian violinist and Hubay pupil. Szigeti's own penetrating tone isn't necessarily always 'nice' but it has a fabulous repertoire of colour, articulation and overall rhetoric.

With **Ginette Neveu** the Joachim cadenza settles as the default, meaning that from henceforth you can assume its presence unless told otherwise. Her obvious choice is her 1946 studio recording with the Philharmonia Orchestra and Issay Dobrowen (Warner, 4/48). But then came three live takes, and although Hans Schmidt-Isserstedt and the NDR Symphony Orchestra at the Hamburg Music Hall in 1948 could have been better captured, this performance is brimming with heart and sense of partnership, Neveu sounding fierily soulful.

Yehudi Menuhin's noble, flexible account the following year with Wilhelm Furtwängler and the Lucerne Festival Orchestra inaugurates the slightly more relaxed tempos that will become the new norm, the ambient surrounding space lending an atmospheric halo. And what an account, with the orchestra's shapely might and passionate interplay with multicoloured Menuhin, whose own playing (featuring the Kreisler cadenza) feels palpably connected to the period's opera greats via vocal-sounding vibrato, portamento inflections (the Menuhin slide) and rubato shaping, reaching fever pitch in his *Adagio*. Even the finale, which kicks off feeling only just on the right side of stolid, quickly convinces with its magisterial swing.

Ida Haendel and Sergiu Celibidache's 1953 reading with the London Symphony Orchestra may be in mono but there's a nicely balanced richness and depth. To Celibidache's grandeur, Haendel brings poised expression combining mellow tone with physical power and bite. Her gorgeously sculpted cadenza has the silent surrounding space sounding wonderfully

CHAMBER CHOICE

Isabelle Faust; Mahler CO / **Daniel Harding**

Harmonia Mundi HMC90 2075

Isabelle Faust's subtly pacy, pure-feeling reading shines with cannily shaped loving conversation and elegantly

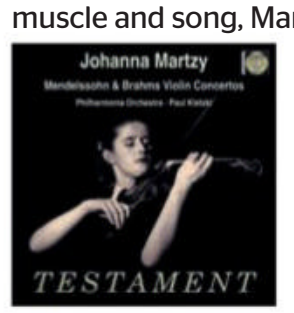
ear-grabbing colouristic detail; and never has the finale's Turkish coda sounded like such a springing, fun-filled canter.

CLASSIC CHOICE

Johanna Martzy; Philharmonia Orch / **Paul Kletzki**

Testament SBT1037 or Warner ⑨ 9029 64885-7

For those who like their Brahms with leisurely, perfectly paced, mahogany-toned muscle and song, Martzy and Kletzki pack a



punch, followed by a blistering Mendelssohn Concerto. Opt for Warner's digital-only option and you get the Beethoven Romances thrown in, too.

HEART ON SLEEVE

Yehudi Menuhin; Lucerne Festival Orch / **Wilhelm Furtwängler**

Warner Classics ⑥ 9029 56338-3

Look away if you like things cool and collected, but with orchestra and soloist alike playing as though each note were

their last, violin-playing mirroring operatic vocal technique and a Kreisler cadenza that'll turn you into a puddle, this is electrifying.

PHOTOGRAPHY: UNIVERSAL HISTORY ARCHIVE/UIG/BRIDGEMAN IMAGES

present, and colouristically striking moments include, at 21'11" in the coda, Haendel's trembling vibrato over her sweetly ethereal descent.

Come the following year there's **Johanna Martzy** with the Philharmonia Orchestra and Paul Kletzki. Another Hungarian Hubay pupil, Martzy's open-hearted, rich-toned power and lyricism, coloured with a distinctively pronounced vibrato, combines throughout to fabulous effect with the Philharmonia's own thunder and melt, all of it beautifully shaped and lucidly handled, with bright, warm, natural recording. The finale is a fantastic combination of physical might and twinkle-toed dignity, and a zinging Mendelssohn Violin Concerto follows.

Nathan Milstein's 1953/54 reading with the Pittsburgh Symphony under Steinberg returns us briefly to the previous generation's brisker tempos, everything feeling spontaneously flowing and connected, the orchestra sleek, chic and plump, and solos shining out. Milstein's playing is sweet, clean and elegant, with every colour thought through – for instance gorgeously adapting his vibrato to throaty-husky for the first movement's bar 467 *lusingando* – and with his own captivating cadenza. The only thing is whether it's all too controlled.

Leonid Kogan's direct-toned, virile strength is more drily captured in 1958 with the Philharmonia Orchestra and Kirill Kondrashin, but attractively so; and while the microphone moves ever closer to him over the subsequent movements, the sound quality still trumps his live recording the same year with a fiery Boston Symphony Orchestra and Pierre Monteux – his US debut, so listen-worthy (now on Doremi). Both are a far cry from Arthur Grumiaux's equally compelling but softer, polished sweetness the same year with Eduard van Beinum (Jube Classics), the faster of two beautiful readings with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra.

Of **Henryk Szeryng**'s four recordings, you can't go wrong with his vibrantly captured 1959 account with Monteux and the London Symphony Orchestra. Szeryng's initial entry comes with a wild, speedy bang, and while some might find his tone a bit sharp, it works with the gleaming, excited orchestra. A nice individual touch is his subtle rejection of the slurs in bars 539-42, although generally he follows dynamic markings to the letter.

For a romantic-end 1960s reading you could head to Christian Ferras with Herbert von Karajan and the Berlin Philharmonic (DG, 11/64), but for romance with living-life-on-the-edge thrill factor, head to **Zino Francescatti** with Leonard Bernstein and the New York Philharmonic, the orchestra's shimmering might finding a perfect foil in Francescatti's silvery slender freedom coloured by febrile vibrato. The finale is resplendent, crisply rhythmic orchestral weight meeting airy, playful brilliance from Francescatti, with the clarity of bar 128's oboe line typifying the lucidity throughout.

David Oistrakh tends to be miked at the expense of his orchestras, although that's no bad thing with the acerbic-toned Moscow RTV Symphony Orchestra under Kondrashin (CDK, 12/54). His recording with Franz Konwitschny and the Staatskapelle Dresden has much to recommend it (DG, 7/55), although balance is better with Klemperer (Warner, 11/61). Yet there's a compelling tautness in 1969 with Szell and the Cleveland Orchestra, who are wonderful-sounding if not always wonderfully captured.

Anne-Sophie Mutter's spacious 1981 reading with Karajan and the Berlin Philharmonic decidedly trumps her slower, more mannered take with Kurt Masur and the New York Philharmonic (DG, 12/97). First, the magisterial beauty of Karajan's introduction. Then velvety Mutter knocking the proverbial socks off her entry with her darkly fiery, legato intensity, after which further ear-pricking moments

Johanna Martzy's 1954 account packs a punch

PHOTOGRAPHY: TESTAMENT RECORDS

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

RECORDING DATE / ARTISTS		RECORD COMPANY (REVIEW DATE)
1935	**Jascha Heifetz**; New York PO / **Arturo Toscanini**	New York Philharmonic Historic Broadcasts ⑩ NYP970 (1/98)
1936	**Fritz Kreisler**; LPO / **John Barbirolli**	Naxos 8 110925; Warner Classics ⑥ 5419 72057-7 (7/58)
1943	**Adolf Busch**; Philh SO of New York / **William Steinberg**	Music & Arts CD1107
1944	**Bronisław Huberman**; Philh SO of New York / **Artur Rodzinski**	Pristine Classical PASC421
1945	**Joseph Szigeti**; Philadelphia Orch / **Eugene Ormandy**	Sony Classical ⑰ 19075 94035-2 (7/47, 6/21)
1948	**Ginette Neveu**; NDR SO / **Hans Schmidt-Isserstedt**	Tahra TAH465; TAH684 (11/99)
1949	**Yehudi Menuhin**; Lucerne Fest Orch / **Wilhelm Furtwängler**	Warner Classics ⑥ 9029 56338-3 (4/50, 9/90)
1953	**Ida Haendel**; LSO / **Sergiu Celibidache**	Testament SBT1038 (2/55, 10/94)
1953/54	**Nathan Milstein**; Pittsburgh SO / **William Steinberg**	EMI 567583-2 (12/54)
1954	**Johanna Martzy**; Philh Orch / **Paul Kletzki**	Testament SBT1037 (10/54, 9/94); Warner ⑨ 9029 64885-7 (8/22)
1958	**Leonid Kogan**; Philh Orch / **Kirill Kondrashin**	Guild GHCD2394
1958	**Henryk Szeryng**; LSO / **Pierre Monteux**	RCA ⑧ 19075 81634-2 (11/59)
1961	**Zino Francescatti**; New York PO / **Leonard Bernstein**	Sony Classical SMK47540 (12/63)
1969	**David Oistrakh**; Cleveland Orch / **George Szell**	Warner Classics ⑰ 214712-2 (2/70; 11/08); ⑭ 9029 52671-8 (3/21)
1981	**Anne-Sophie Mutter**; BPO / **Herbert von Karajan**	DG 410 603-2GH (9/83, 10/83); ⑤ 477 7572GB5
1990	**Nigel Kennedy**; LPO / **Klaus Tennstedt**	Warner Classics 754187-2 (4/91)
1991	**Tasmin Little**; RLPO / **Vernon Handley**	CfP 574941-2 (2/93)
1994	**Joshua Bell**; Cleveland Orch / **Christoph von Dohnányi**	Decca 444 811-2DH (5/96)
1996	**Gidon Kremer**; Royal Concertgebouw Orch / **Nikolaus Harnoncourt**	Warner Classics 9029 64211-2 (11/97)
2001	**Hilary Hahn**; ASMF / **Neville Marriner**	Sony Classical SK89649 (1/02)
2002	**Rachel Barton Pine**; Chicago SO / **Carlos Kalmar**	Cedille ② CDR90000 068 (8/03)
2004	**Julian Rachlin**; Bavarian RSO / **Mariss Jansons**	Warner Classics 2564 61561-2 (5/05)
2006	**Thomas Zehetmair**; Northern Sinf	Avie AV2125 (7/07)
2008	**Vadim Repin**; Leipzig Gewandhaus Orch / **Riccardo Chailly**	DG 477 7470GH (3/09)
2010	**Isabelle Faust**; Mahler CO / **Daniel Harding**	Harmonia Mundi HMC90 2075 (6/11)
2011	**Renaud Capuçon**; VPO / **Daniel Harding**	Erato 973396-2 (11/12)
2012	**Lisa Batiashvili**; Staatskapelle Dresden / **Christian Thielemann**	DG 479 0086GH (4/13); ② 479 2787GH4 (11/14)
2013	**Leonidas Kavakos**; Leipzig Gewandhaus Orch / **Riccardo Chailly**	Decca 478 5342DH (12/13)
2015	**Vadim Gluzman**; Lucerne SO / **James Gaffigan**	BIS BIS2172 (7/17)
2015	**Janine Jansen**; S Cecilia Orch / **Antonio Pappano**	Decca 478 8412DH (1/16)
2017	**Augustin Hadelich**; Norwegian Rad Orch / **Miguel Harth-Bedoya**	Warner Classics 9029 55104-5 (6/19)
2019	**Gil Shaham**; The Knights / **Eric Jacobsen**	Canary Classics CC20 (6/21)
2022	**Christian Tetzlaff**; Deutsches SO Berlin / **Robin Ticciati**	Ondine ODE1410-2 (11/22)

include the clarity with which at bar 75 in her singing, luxuriously vibrato'd *Adagio* she drops to the tiniest whisper.

Romantic intensity: Yehudi Menuhin's Brahms is captivating

MA NON TROPPO

While the odd significantly slower reading is now popping up – Itzhak Perlman's first movement is 24'42" with Carlo Maria Giulini and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (Warner, 11/77) – **Nigel Kennedy** sets a new record in 1990 with the London Philharmonic Orchestra and Klaus Tennstedt, serving up a sticky, bitty-feeling 26'16" first movement; and their whopper 11'19" *Adagio* hangs together only slightly better. Still, the actual sound they all make is fabulous, their more standard-tempo finale is fun-filled, and Kennedy's own cadenza is a must-listen for its English pastoral slant (shades of *The Lark Ascending*) and spooky double-stops.

Then in 2002 a satiny **Rachel Barton Pine** with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra under Carlos Kalmar lands a reflective, sepia-toned reading whose huge 26'41" first movement does largely convince, although it's a shame that her correspondingly soft self-penned cadenza sits only as an end-of-disc bonus, losing out to the Joachim. Two period-flavour boons are Pine playing the 1742 Guarneri del Gesù selected for Marie Soldat by Brahms, and Joachim's supersize Violin Concerto No 2 'in the Hungarian style' of 1857 as partner work.

PERIOD-AWARE

For period-aware with pep, head to **Gidon Kremer**, Nikolaus Harnoncourt and the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra for a momentum-rich live account boasting minimal non-marked tempo fluctuation, athletically nimble orchestral playing and Kremer's luminous tone right in the thick of the crystal-clear, committed conversation – and sometimes even deferentially underneath it. Add George Enescu's folky cadenza of 1903, plus a tip-top Double Concerto with Clemens Hagen, and while Kremer's 1982 live performance with Bernstein and the Vienna Philharmonic (DG, 7/83) – sporting Reger's lesser-spotted cadenza – is a fine 'classic' choice, this is the one.

WITH CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

Beyond increased cadenza variety, the other 21st-century development has been chamber orchestras. A striking play-directed effort featuring a self-penned cadenza comes from **Thomas Zehetmair** with the Northern Sinfonia, Zehetmair sounding tense, rushed and closely recorded, and the valiant orchestra struggling to stay alongside. Antje Weithaas's lyrical 2014 play-directing attempt with Camerata Bern (AVI-Music, 1/16) is slightly more successful.

Isabelle Faust's flowing 2011 reading with Daniel Harding and the Mahler Chamber Orchestra takes some acclimitisation if you like hefty whoomph from your Brahms, but stick with it. Beyond a similar tempo approach to Kremer and Harnoncourt, warm textural clarity and agile orchestral chamber responsiveness, colouristic treasures include the strings' first-movement bar 495 accents articulated as tiny stroked swells (16'00") and the love bestowed on absolutely delectable-sounding woodwind and horns; and while Faust's sound is smaller than many, it's lyrical and virtuosically thrilling. To that, add the Busoni cadenza, a radiantly pure, pastoral *Adagio* featuring joyously close dialogue and a rip-roaring finale that barely touches the ground with its lilting, neatly clipped aerial spring. An equally radiant Second Sextet follows.

After a fine 'classic' 2000 take with Claudio Abbado and the Berlin Philharmonic (DG, 8/02), a speedy, spontaneous and virtuoso **Gil Shaham** paired in 2019 with Eric Jacobsen and The Knights for an airily chamber-weight return to the concerto's earliest speeds (19'25", 8'05", 7'38"). Here, what you sometimes miss in orchestral heft you gain in a palpable chamber dynamic, reaping especial dividends in the *Adagio*, which opens with the oboe less a soloist than the top line of a beautifully balanced wind ensemble. It's all surprisingly refreshing, preceded by an equally revisionary Beethoven Concerto.

CLASSICS

Still, the norm has remained a spaciously paced symphonic sound, often with thoroughly classic disc pairings. Up there with the best is **Tasmin Little**'s beautifully engineered 1991 recording with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and Vernon Handley – paired with a super Sibelius Concerto – with its blend of symphonic weight and flowing classical purity, Little herself bringing silkily powerful punch and lyricism.

Joshua Bell with Christoph von Dohnányi and the Cleveland Orchestra in 1994 boasts an elegantly spirited, clean-lined orchestra, and although Bell brings bravura, it's his exquisitely quiet *piano* moments that particularly strike, especially in his idiomatic self-penned cadenza, which melts as a mere whisper into a time-suspended coda. The generous surrounding package consists of the Schumann, Dohnányi, Tchaikovsky and second Wieniawski violin concertos.

Other 1990s offerings that, while not benchmark-setting, are classily classic include Pinchas Zukerman with Zubin Mehta and the LA Philharmonic (RCA/Sony, 4/96), Frank Peter Zimmermann's elegant live account with Wolfgang Sawallisch and the Berlin Philharmonic (Warner, 5/96) and a fiery Maxim Vengerov with Barenboim and the Chicago SO (Teldec/Warner/Elatus, 3/99).

A new-century standout comes from warmly spry **Julian Rachlin** with the rich, bright Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra and Mariss Jansons. With crystal-clear recording and preceded by a buoyantly limpid Mozart Third Violin Concerto, this has everyone crisp of articulation, Rachlin strong on both bite and husky sweetness; and while they deliver on punch, the score's opportunities for loaded stillness are also leapt upon. Take their *Adagio* bar 64 pause (4'46"), which is entered so softly, and with the silence so sudden and total, that its effect is heart-rending.

Two fine pairings with the Double Concerto are, first, Julia Fischer with the Netherlands Philharmonic under Yakov Kreizberg, joined for the Double by Daniel Müller-Schott (Pentatone, 8/07), then **Vadim Repin** with Riccardo Chailly and

Lisa Batiashvili and Christian Thielemann's beautifully polished account is a top choice

the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, Truls Mørk on board for the Double. Here, rich-toned Repin's first-movement gift is a supremely polished revival of Heifetz's cadenza, sounding altogether more convincing now it is allowed to breathe.

Renaud Capuçon's nod to the Golden Age is Vienna-shaped, teaming up with Daniel Harding and the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra for an impassioned, satiny, spaciously sailing and chamber-aware interpretation featuring the Kreisler cadenza, followed by a romantic-leaning Berg Concerto – a pairing **Christian Tetzlaff** repeats in 2022 with the Joachim cadenza. This, recorded live with the Danish Symphony Orchestra and Robin Ticciati, sees Tetzlaff verily explode up his initial entry, thereafter bringing both bridge-rattling unbuttonedness and extreme *piano* sweetness, while the orchestra combine grandeur with devilish charm and athleticism. Sometimes Tetzlaff's phrasing and metric flexibility can feel a bit mannered or rushed, but mostly it's just magnetic and full of thoughtful detail. For a great example of some of the conversational colour Ticciati coaxes out, listen to the cellos' vivacious duetting at 2'25" in the finale.

UPPING THE PAPRIKA

Rachel Barton Pine isn't the only violinist to have spotted Hungarian pairing mileage. Baiba Skride pairs hers with vivid *Hungarian Dances*, accompanied by her pianist sister, Lauma Skride (Orfeo, 10/11). In 2013 **Leonidas Kavakos** beguiles with pianist Péter Nagy in Bartók's two Rhapsodies and six *Romanian Folk Dances*, plus four *Hungarian Dances*, after a mighty Concerto with Chailly and the Gewandhaus. High on slower-tempo reflection, this one's *Adagio* pausings might feel over-egged to some, but no other violinist has taken its bar 74 *calando* marking so seriously, and Kavakos's finale brilliance extends in bar 99 to inserting his own double-stopped ornament (2'08").

In 2015 **Janine Jansen** is at her multifaceted best with Antonio Pappano and the Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia through a live recording of both tenderness and bang, paired with a softly exquisite studio Bartók First Violin Concerto with the London Symphony Orchestra.

BRAHMS'S IMMEDIATE WORLD

In 2013, before Clara Schumann's three Romances became so popular, **Lisa Batiashvili**'s polished, lyrical, spontaneous-feeling readings with Alice Sara Ott are the cherry on the cake to her superb Concerto with the Staatskapelle Dresden and Christian Thielemann, set in an attractively ample acoustic, over which she displays similar qualities to her orchestral partnering, balancing thunder and might with chamber intimacy and lucidity. There's also the Busoni cadenza, bigger-boned and more spacious than Faust's, with a huge dynamic and dramatic sweep. Then, after a ravishing *Adagio* of flowing wax and wane and edge-of-seat dialogue, a nimbly fun finale containing some unexpected romance via Batiashvili's suddenly softly legato delivery at bar 222 (5'07") – thus not quite hitting the score's *forte*, but a gorgeously rendered surprise.

It's a wonder there aren't more pairings with the First Violin Sonata, but **Vadim Gluzman** with Angela Yoffe is a winner, attached to a Concerto with the Lucerne Symphony Orchestra and James Gaffigan full of old-world class, with a darkly feisty finale; and while you wish at points that the orchestra had had whatever Gluzman had had for breakfast, horns and woodwind are thoroughly in the game for the *Adagio*.

SURPRISING PAIRINGS

Few violinists go in entirely off-piste pairing directions but **Hilary Hahn**'s Brahms with Neville Marriner and the Academy of St Martin in the Fields is followed by the Stravinsky Concerto, both works zinging through her gleaming, focused tone, whistle-clean attack and fabulous sense of line. Specific Brahms pleasures include in the first movement how Hahn means serious business in her climaxes, and the elegant orchestra's shimmering anticipation when gearing up towards an unleashing.

Then in 2019 **Augustin Hadelich**, with the Norwegian Radio Orchestra and Miguel Hartha-Bedoya, opts for the Ligeti Concerto to partner a Brahms of a sinewy darkness and much reflective stillness, sporting a dramatic self-penned cadenza whose intensity is heightened by Hadelich's audible breathing.

So there we go. Writing a Collection on Brahms's Violin Concerto is arguably a fool's game: so many recordings by so many greats. It's also a work that feels as though it went deep for Brahms, and equally so for many today. Hopefully your favourite made the cut, but if it didn't, you have my heartfelt apologies and sympathy! G

TOP CHOICE

Lisa Batiashvili; Staatskapelle Dresden / **Christian Thielemann**
DG 479 0086GH

With polished recording and a deliciously ample acoustic, this lucid, beautifully shaped reading full of close exchange offers surely a perfect ratio of fire and romance, push and pull. Batiashvili herself sounds spontaneous and heart-prickingly lyrical, despatching her virtuosities with glowing-toned finesse.

PHOTOGRAPHY: MIKE EVANS/EMI ARCHIVES, MATTHIAS CREUTZIGER

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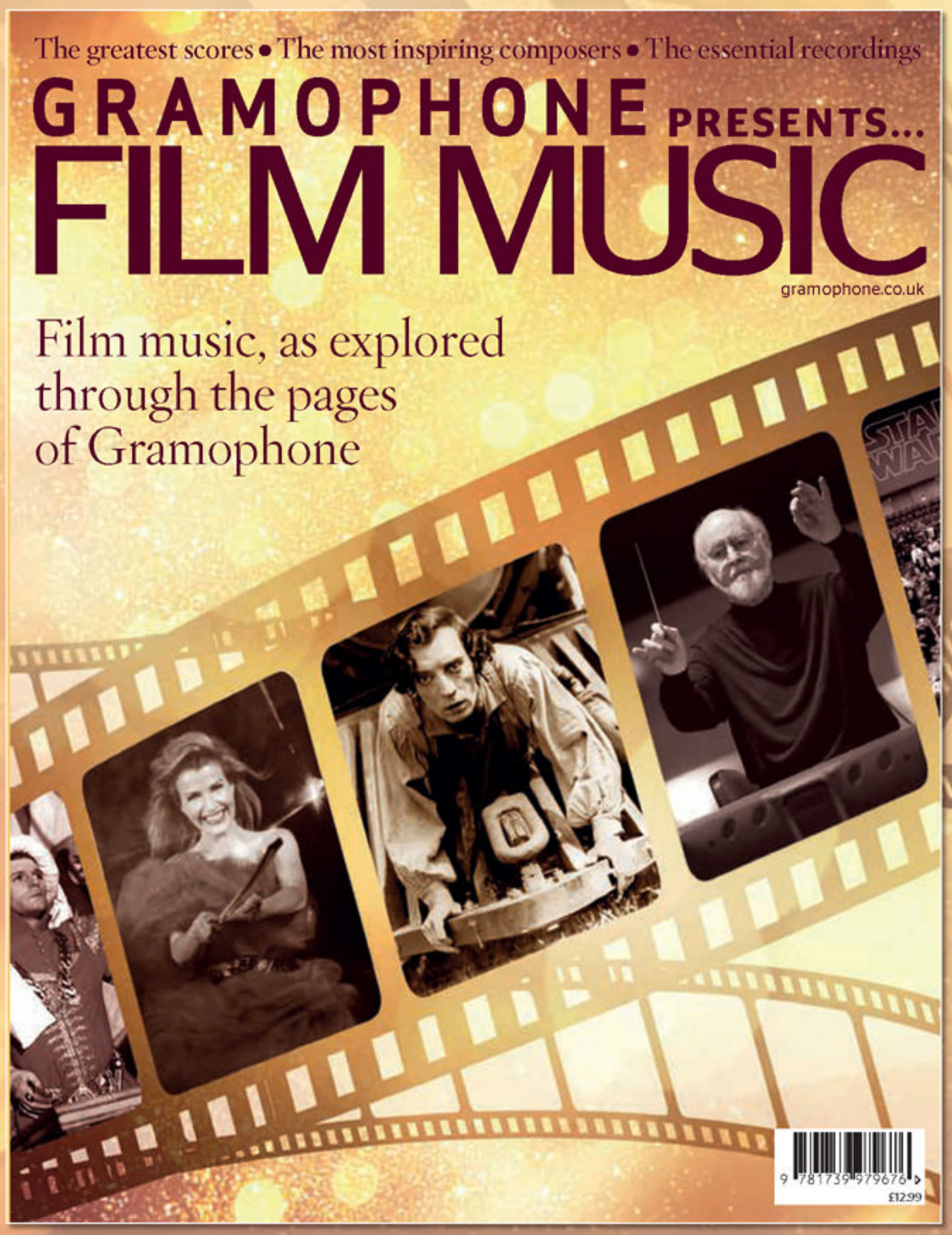

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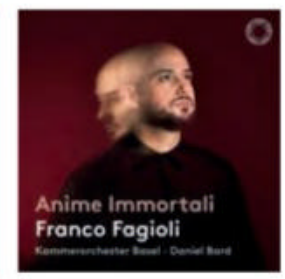
THIS MONTH A very affordable amplifier, hand-made in Britain, the world of super-luxury speakers, and does hi-fi have to look like hi-fi, or should product designs be more adventurous?
Andrew Everard, Audio Editor

JULY TEST DISCS

A wonderfully focused and intimate view of the guitar, placed in a vibrant acoustic, in this set of Bach arrangements from Sony, performed by Thibault Cauvin



Spellbinding vocal clarity and character are the hallmark of this sparkling recital by Franco Fagioli (for Pentatone) of Mozart arias written for castrato

ESSAY

Out of the box thinking

Advances in technology and materials have freed designers' hands to be more adventurous with their hi-fi products. But is this a good thing?

The other week, I found myself sitting before one of the most outlandish hi-fi designs I have ever encountered, which is saying something given some of the products that pass through my room in an average year. The product in question was the new Monitor Audio Hyphn speaker, and as you can see from the picture (right), it looks quite unlike any speaker you've ever seen.

I'd been surprised by it when – as the Concept 50 – it made its debut at last year's High End Show in Germany, where it sparked both intrigue and discussion, not least because many attendees seemed to be finding it hard to fathom just how it worked. Two slender uprights, finished in matt white and seemingly cool and inert when touched, like stone, are joined together at the top by thin tubular bars, while around the front wraps what looks like one of those extravagant belts awarded to boxing champions.

All very eye-catching, but what was it all about? I saw show-goers trying to squeeze hands – and in one case, a head! – between the uprights, while the jewel-like glitter of the 'belt' under the spotlights was also attracting a lot of attention. However, opinions were divided along the spectrum from brave to bonkers, at least until more detail of the design emerged.

You see, outlandish though the design looked – and still does, having transitioned to a production version almost unaltered – a strong case can be made for this being a fascinating combination of form following function and the flexibility accorded by modern materials and technology. Those 'twin towers', joined at the top by the vestigial bridges, the architectural term for which gives the finished speaker its name, are each a single piece, moulded then machined from mineral-loaded acrylic 'stone', the design enabling the downward-venting bass ports and internal bracing to be constructed as a part of the enclosure, rather than be added later.

These towers house the speakers' four bass units – two in each column, with each pair facing the other to provide force-cancelling, this combining with the strength and rigidity of the housings to counter one of the biggest problems in speaker design: the desire of a big, powerful bass driver to flex the baffle in which it's mounted. It's not the first time such an assembly has been attempted, but it's more usual to have the drivers horizontally opposed by firing them outwards from both sides of an enclosure.

And that 'belt'? Well, it mounts the treble and midrange drivers at the same position as the bass drivers, in an effort to create the speaker ideal of a 'point source', where all the frequencies appear to emanate from the same place. It's something designers of conventional speakers struggle to achieve when drive units must be stacked in a vertical array on the front of a cabinet, and the history of hi-fi design has seen myriad 'solutions' being used to tackle this problem.

Here again, materials and their handling have come to the aid of the party in the Hyphn: while the main part of the belt – or 'M-Array' as the company calls it – is formed from aluminium, the central section is 3D-printed. And even the drivers within it are unusual, the central micro-pleated ribbon-type tweeter being surrounded by a ring of six 5cm midrange drive-units, again aiming for that 'point source' configuration. Combine that with the bass output from those opposed drivers in the void between the two towers, and you have a speaker designed to sound much more of a piece than many a conventional design.

And it's not just in speakers – and indeed not just in £70,000 products – that technological advances are shaping the products we can buy. The increased integration of functions on single circuitboards gives engineers and designers much more freedom to create more compact and visually appealing hi-fi systems, while the adoption and refinement of new amplifier technologies, more space efficient and cooler-running, means products no longer need to be huge and full of fresh air to dissipate heat.

The Monitor Audio speakers may be an extreme example of change, but there are signs throughout the hi-fi world that perceptions are changing. And I think we're just at the start of this process: after all, the phone or tablet on which you may be reading this is orders of magnitude faster and more powerful than the computers that first put a man on the Moon, and all the music in the world can be available at the end of an internet connection.

Change is happening – and it accelerates …

Edwards Audio Apprentice IA

Not only is this new amplifier compact, simple to use and fine-sounding, it's also designed and manufactured in the UK, very affordable – and colourful, too!

EDWARDS AUDIO APPRENTICE IA

Price £369.95, IA1 version with remote control £429.95
Inputs Moving magnet phono, three line-ins including 3.5mm stereo input on front panel
Outputs One set of speakers, headphones on 6.3mm socket
Output power 30W into 8ohms
Finishes Black, white, red, blue, grey and green
Dimensions (WxHxD) 22x7x23.5cm
talkelectronics.com

There's no shortage of new stereo amplifiers: while the choice isn't what it once was, with a baffling range lining the shelves of those hi-fi shops you found on just about every high street, there's still a steady flow of new product, even if much of it seems to be aimed at the higher levels of the market. However, the arrival of a highly affordable stereo amplifier is a relative rarity, and especially when the amplifier in question is both designed and assembled in the UK, and comes in a very on-trend compact form ideal to slot away on a shelf rather than filling the room with masses of black boxes.

Talking of black boxes, yes, this one does come in black, or the rather striking white of the review sample – but you can also have it in red, blue, grey and green to match your room. Or indeed your turntable, as its manufacturer also makes record-players – again all built in Britain – in those colours. The company in question is Edwards Audio, which came out of the Cable Talk and Talk Electronics brands that made such waves on the UK hi-fi scene some decades back: having recently moved into a new factory in Wiltshire, previously having spent three years researching and developing new products, it's promising many new launches this year.

So, British-built, hand-assembled and a range of colours – sounds expensive? Hardly: the amplifier we have here, the Apprentice IA (for Integrated Amplifier), is just £369.95, with a remote-control version, the IA1, available at a £60 premium. Each is very small – around 22cm wide – and prices have been kept down by making some of the frills available to order as extra-cost options: you can add on preout functionality to allow extra power amplifiers to be added, a fixed output, for example to feed a recorder, and Bluetooth aptX HD input card to let music stream from your phone or tablet, the Apprentice sharing a rear-panel with other models from the company to accommodate these add-ons.

> It was more than able to deliver both fine level and plenty of detail, along with decent bass warmth and definition

For many, however, the Apprentice IA will be all that's needed. There's a high-quality dedicated moving magnet phono stage fitted as standard – again, not surprising as the company has a range of eight record-players on its books, starting with the £400 Apprentice TT and rising to the £1500 TT6 SC Carbon – along with two line inputs to the rear and a front-panel 3.5mm socket for the quick hook-up of portable devices. You select the input required using the knob to the left of the front panel, and the volume with the one on the right, and that's almost it: the only other feature, below the blue illuminated 'E' logo, is a full-size 6.3mm headphone socket, driven by its own high-current output circuit and with the usual 'insert a plug to mute the speakers' arrangement.

OK, so you could go for the sybaritic luxury of the IA1, which gains you remote control of volume and muting, and a logo that turns red when muting is engaged, but given the intention of these amplifiers as being ideal for desktops and small rooms, where they will probably be within

SUGGESTED PARTNERS

The simple Apprentice amplifier would be perfect for a desktop system – just add ...

IFI AUDIO UNO

Compact and yet highly effective, the iFi Audio Uno is a simple way to connect a computer to the amplifier

Q ACOUSTICS 3010

Standing just 23.5cm tall, the little Q Acoustics 3010 will make an affordable desktop addition to the Apprentice amplifier

reach, one might consider such facilities as beyond the purity of the amplifier we have here, which has a simple charm all of its own. Really for the kind of smaller systems to which many are turning, whether as a second-room set-up or simply to downsize, this amp, with a 30W per channel output into 8ohms sufficient to drive modern compact speaker systems, will be all that's needed for very enjoyable listening.

Think in terms of the Q Acoustics 3010i or Wharfedale's Diamond 12.1 model, neither of which is especially power-hungry, and both of which are around the £200/pr mark, and you could have the beginnings of a very good little starter set-up.

PERFORMANCE

The Apprentice IA isn't going to pin you back in your seat with 'front row of the stalls' concert-hall levels when playing large-scale orchestral music, but it will have more than enough information, detail and dynamics to ensure whatever you choose to listen to will be delivered in entertaining fashion.

Speaker connection is via 4mm sockets, meaning you'll need banana plugs on your speaker cables to hook it up, but beyond that set-up of the amplifier is as simple as its operation – which is to say very simple indeed! Mind you, as a desktop device the Apprentice IA is a very competent headphone amplifier, even before you start using it to drive speakers: the preamp section does a fine job of both powering and controlling even demanding headphone loads, and sounded excellent with my reference headphones, from the highly-revealing Austrian Audio Hi-X55 model to the big, lush-sounding Bowers & Wilkins P9 Signature.

However, move beyond that capability and this little amplifier is impressive when driving speakers: connected to my desktop references, Neat Acoustics' little Iotas, it was more than able to deliver both fine level and plenty of detail, along with decent bass warmth and definition, doing a fine job even with large-scale orchestral works at the kind of levels at which desktop listening requires. Yes, the amplifier runs a little warm, but then it's designed to disperse heat via its casework, and never actually gets hot even when playing at high levels.

Quite apart from being rather more expensive than the speakers one might typically use with this little amplifier, the Iotas aren't the most sensitive speakers, and the Apprentice amp is near to the lower end of their recommended power range, but the combination worked exceptionally well, as did a little pair of £100 standmounters, now discontinued but kept as a budget benchmark, showing how well this amplifier is sorted for use with compact designs of reasonable sensitivity.

Yes, there's very little to it, the Apprentice IA lacking many of the frills now common on stereo amplifiers, but the proof is in the listening, and this little amplifier proves quite a breath of fresh-air simplicity. G

Or you could try ...

There's a whole sub-class of miniaturised amplifiers perfect for desktop and small-room use:

Pro-ject MaiA DS3

Just a few months ago these pages reviewed the little Pro-ject MaiA DS3, which stands just 7cm tall and less than 21cm wide. Yes, it's considerably more expensive than the Apprentice IA, but it does offer both digital and analogue inputs, plus a substantial 80W per channel output. Find out more at **henleyaudio.co.uk**

Chord Anni

If you want an even smaller amplifier, then the Chord Anni is the desktop solution for you: it's just 16cm wide and 4.25cm tall, and can be stacked with other Chord Electronics components in a dedicated rack. But choose sensitive speakers as the output is only 10W. For full details, see **chordelectronics.co.uk**

NAD D 3020 V2

Like the Apprentice, the NAD D 3020 V2 – the latest version of one of the all-time favourite budget amplifiers – delivers 30W per channel. It has both analogue and digital inputs, and you can lay it on your desk or stand it upright, as you can see at **nadelectronics.com**

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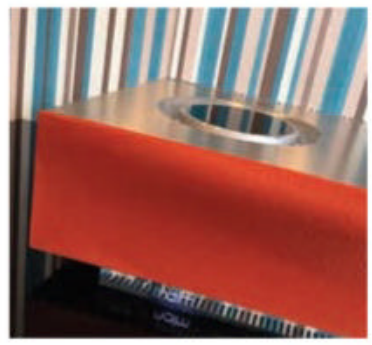

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THE GRAMOPHONE GUIDE TO ...

High-end speakers

As we saw in this month's essay, there's a lot of innovation in the £70,000/pr Monitor Audio Hyphn speakers. But they're far from alone in the rarefied world of the high-end ...

How much would you budget for a pair of loudspeakers? Well, in most systems the speakers are the most characterful part of the reproduction chain, both in the terms of the effect they can have on the sound and the fact that most of your listening time is going to be spent looking at them, and most designers and engineers will tell you that creating a new speaker is a matter of juggling materials, components, industrial design and cost to come up with a commercial product.

However, what happens when the price restraints are lifted? In come exotic materials and cost-no-object engineering, and it's surprisingly easy to spend the better part of a million pounds on a pair of speakers, even if that probably means you'll need a similar amount for the electronics to drive them – and quite possibly several times more to build a home with a room to house them.

So, what do you get in a pair of speakers for this kind of money? In the case of the Magico M9, 1 officially listed as 'price on application', you get a curvaceous tower formed from inner and outer skins of carbon fibre sandwiching an aluminium honeycomb, said to provide exemplary stiffness while reducing weight, although the 2m-tall speakers weigh a huge 454kg apiece. By contrast, fellow Americans Wilson Audio take a very different approach with their similarly-priced WAMM Master Chronosonic design: 2 again it has a looming presence, but it's one with a massive lower housing containing the bass drivers, above which a skeletal framework houses separate enclosures for each of the midrange and treble drivers, every one of which has a separate adjustment to enable it to be angled toward the listening position. As with all these high-end speakers, you can expect it to be delivered and installed: so big and heavy are these designs that they usually come in pieces, and require precise set-up and tuning.

The same kind of adjustment is available on the flagship of French company Focal's range, the Grande Utopia Evo EM, 3 which comes complete with a separate power supply for the electromagnet in the bass department, and a crank handle to adjust all the separate sub-enclosures relative to each other, as they tilt forward from the base unit. Mind you, this is a relatively inexpensive speaker by the standards of the extreme high end, and will leave you just a little change from £200,000!

As with all the speakers in this arena, a degree of customisation is possible, whether you want the finish to match your room or your Ferrari, but British start-up Stratton Acoustic goes further with its Elypsis 512 début model. 4 The styling of the speaker draws on the thinking of classic studio monitors, with its twin 38cm bass drivers, 30cm midrange and 29mm tweeter in a wide cabinet the company describes as 'unashamedly big and unfeasibly heavy', but at prices starting from around £70,000, the company can customise the look of the speaker as far as you want, from a choice of colours all the way through to the materials used. You want your speakers made from metal or glass? It can be done …

Meanwhile, in rural Wales, AX Horn Loudspeakers makes its AXJET series, 5 using organic forms and a unique design described as 'the ultimate playback monitor … from rock to classical, loud or soft, point-source, full-range, flat response, no crossover, no distortion, incredibly fast transient dynamics and breathtakingly realistic.' The series started a full 30 years ago, and has been refined over the decades, with the most recent AXJET and the AX SUPERJET models claiming performance 'in the audiophile domain of pure sonic reproduction whilst having PA levels of power, making them incredibly versatile.' Prices start from around £55,000 a pair.

Mind you, you don't have to spend quite that much, or have speakers so radical-looking: as part of its manufacturer's Heritage series, the Klipsch Klipschorn AK6, at £22,599 a pair, 6 is a design more than 70 years old – in fact company founder Paul W Klipsch's original corner horn speaker design, launched in 1946. Components and some elements of the design have been improved and refined over the years, but this is essentially a speaker from the very beginnings of hi-fi, still handmade in Hope, Arkansas.

The KEF Blade One Meta 7 couldn't be much further from the Klipsch, but this revolutionary design is one of the most compelling buys in the high-end market. Selling for £30,000/pr, and with the company's distortion-busting Metamaterial Absorption Technology behind its 12th-generation Uni-Q driver, which delivers superb focus and stereo imaging, the speaker is engineered and handbuilt at KEF's factory in Maidstone, Kent. It uses that 'aerodynamic' enclosure from which it takes its name, with no parallel surfaces, and a quartet of horizontally-opposed bass drivers give a powerful sound to complement the Uni-Q's point-source effect.

And as if that wasn't striking enough, you can buy it in a choice of eight driver/cabinet colour combinations – or just supply a Pantone reference and you can have it in any colour you want. G

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Tan Twan Eng

The Man Booker-nominated Malaysian novelist on how music accompanies him as he writes at his home in South Africa

I came to classical music late, probably about 20 years ago, and it was mainly thanks to my partner. I started with opera, because there was a radio programme in South Africa every Sunday night. And normally my partner would have it on and I would be reading and not really paying attention to it. And then one night this piece of music came on, and I just put down my book and I asked, 'What's that?' And he said it was 'Casta diva – Joan Sutherland'. And from that moment, I was fascinated. I just tried to listen to as many operas as I could – mainly Italian – and I tried to learn more about them, and I loved it. I love the different voices.

The funny thing with Asian parents is that they all force their children to learn a musical instrument, especially the piano, because then it looks grand in the house. My parents – who weren't the musical sort – never did that. They never insisted that me or my sister learn anything. When I was seven or eight they just asked, 'Do you want to learn?'. Of course I said no, which I always regretted. So when I turned 50 last year, I made a vow to myself that I would start taking piano lessons. And I did. I naturally thought that, with my enthusiasm and my interest, it would come naturally, and I would be playing well within six months. But it's been extremely difficult, challenging and frustrating. I'm starting to learn simple pieces and I enjoy it. The wonderful thing is that because nobody is forcing me to learn, I practise every day. I don't need my mum or my dad to come with a cane and say, 'Play' which is what all Asian kids go through. (If I look at my cousins, they were forced to learn the piano, and they did. They went very far, up to grade seven and grade eight, but the moment they got there, they just stopped playing completely. They never touched it again. They hated it.) It's difficult, isn't it? Because if you ask a seven-year-old child, he or she wouldn't know. And I often jokingly tell my parents that I blame them for not forcing me to learn!

There's definitely a musicality to writing. I always read the first draft of my manuscripts aloud when I finish them, because you have to listen, and catch, whether there's any repetition of words or sounds. You have to develop that sensitivity to language the way a musician would with the different tones and notes. I would say there's a direct connection or a link. A musician who starts writing novels would have an advantage over a writer who doesn't really listen to music. That's why you can see it in the writing of someone like Kazuo Ishiguro, who is a jazz musician.

I put myself into a semi trance when I write, and the way I do that is by listening to music through earphones. It normally will be the same piece of music in a loop, again and again, for most of the duration of writing the book. Every time I finish a book now I hear that same piece of music; I'm back there again. For *The House of Doors* it was 'L'heure exquise' by Reynaldo Hahn. I came to know it from the recording by Philippe Jaroussky – just the purity of his voice really struck me. When I heard it, I just stopped doing everything. I said, 'What is this?' And, by a happy coincidence, when I made more research about the piece and Reynaldo Hahn and Verlaine's poem, I found out about Verlaine's affair with Rimbaud and how it ended. And it fitted well into the situation in my book with Somerset Maugham and his lover Gerald Haxton, and also with the other characters, Lesley and her husband. The wonderful thing about writing is that I often make these unexpected discoveries and connections, and straight away they go into the book.

A favourite album of mine is Elīna Garanča's 'Meditation'. There's a track there, *Ave Maria*, by a composer called William Gomez – it's a beautiful piece of music, but what moved me most was that I found out that Gomez had composed the piece as he was dying. He finished it, but he never got to hear it. He died on the day it was premiered. I found that incredibly sad.

Tan Twan Eng's latest novel The House of Doors has just been published by Canongate

THE RECORD I COULDN'T LIVE WITHOUT

'Meditation'

Elīna Garanča et al DG

Garanča is a wonderful singer and every year around New Year, I play William Gomez's *Ave Maria* as a tribute to him, as he died before hearing it.

ILLUSTRATION: PHILIP BANNISTER FROM A PHOTO BY LLOYD SMITH

Danish String Quartet

PRISM V

ECM NEW SERIES

Photo: Caroline Bittencourt

The Danish String Quartet concludes its award-winning 'PRISM' series with Beethoven's final String Quartet op. 135. Each disc sees the quartet presenting one of Beethoven's late quartets as a prism through which to revisit works of J. S. Bach and later masters – in this case, Anton Webern's String Quartet op. 28 (1905).

"These releases must qualify as some of the most essential listening of the past decade."

– New York Times

"Imaginative programming and superb quartet playing make this an outstanding album."

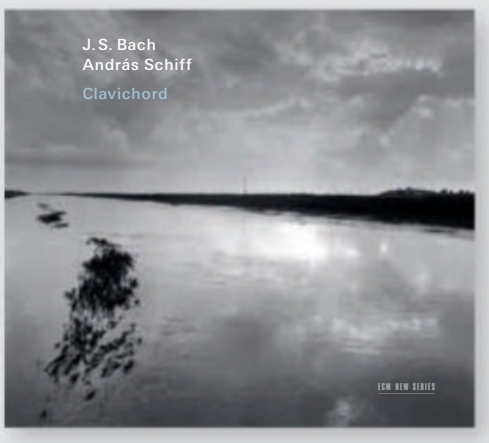
– The Strad (PRISM IV)

Vox Clamantis
Henrik Ødegaard

The Vox Clamantis choir turns its attention towards Norwegian composer Henrik Ødegaard with a fine-drawn programme of liturgical choral music.

"The level of artistry necessary to achieve the kind of living, breathing performance given here by the Estonian Choir Vox Clamantis is a rarity."

– BBC Music Magazine



J. S. Bach
András Schiff
Clavichord

András Schiff describes the sound of the clavichord as "a new world, a quiet oasis in our noisy, troubled times. Thanks to the clavichord I now play and hear Bach differently."

"(The clavichord's) gentle attack and quiet action in Schiff's experienced hands render even the densest three-part counterpoint acoustically crystalline and flush with nuance."

– Gramophone

Bartók / Casken / Beethoven
Thomas Zehetmair / Ruth Killius / Royal Northern Sinfonia

This album represents "a résumé and a departure" for Thomas Zehetmair; his farewell concert with the Royal Northern Sinfonia.

"The highlight (…) was the premiere of a beguilingly intimate double concerto commissioned by the Zehetmairs from John Casken."

– The Guardian

Zsófia Boros
El último aliento

Hungarian guitarist Zsófia Boros presents a solo recital with works by Argentine and French composers – a quiet, expressive album.

"Zsófia Boros is a natural interpreter with a gentle, slightly metallic tone – contrasted crisp black and white print, like ECM's cover-image style."

– BBC Music Magazine

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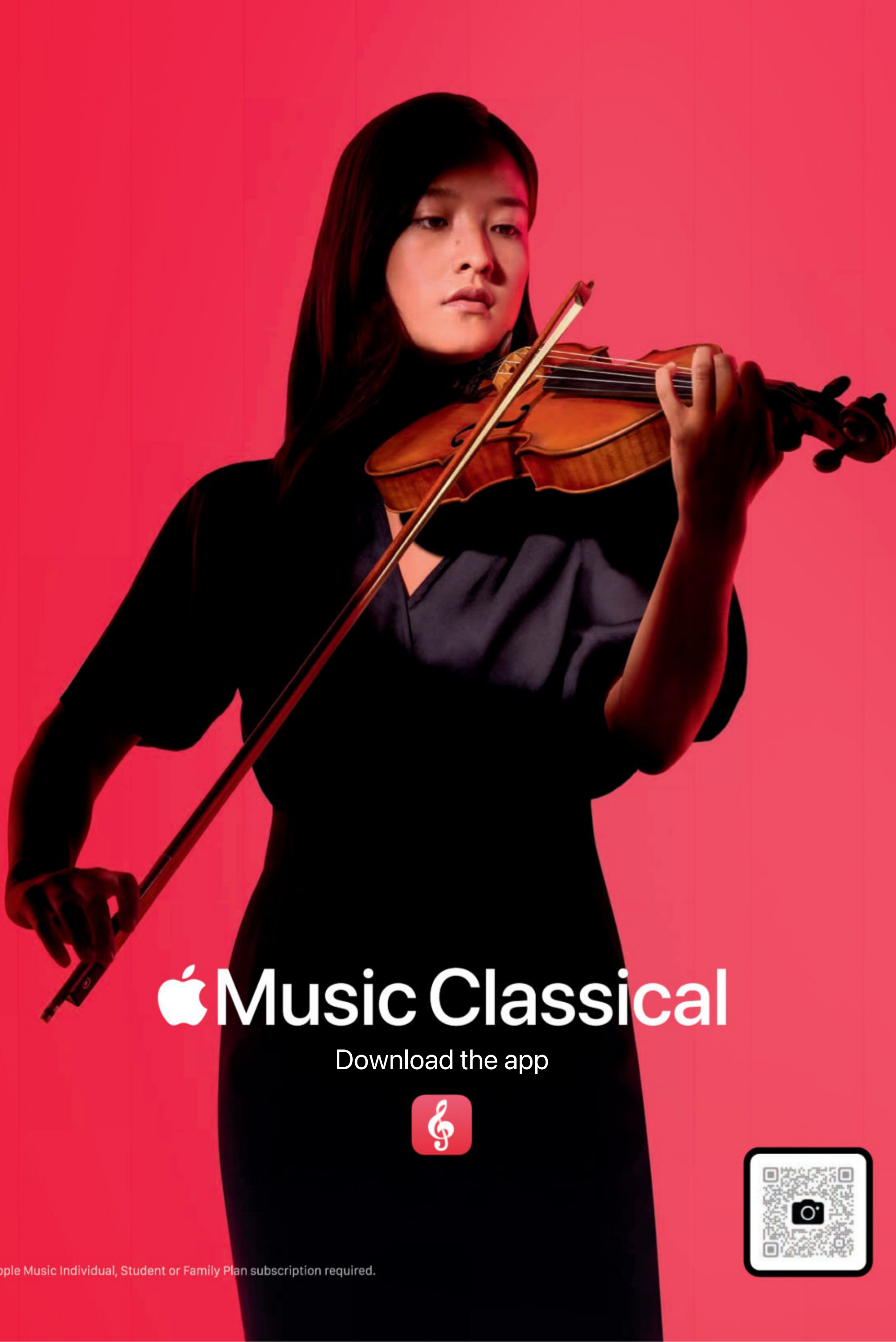

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